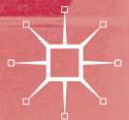


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RHETORIC, SOCIAL VALUE AND THE ARTS

But How Does it Work?

Edited by
**Charlotte Bonham-Carter
and Nicola Mann**



Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts

Charlotte Bonham-Carter • Nicola Mann
Editors

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But How Does it Work?

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macmillan

Editors

Charlotte Bonham-Carter
Central Saint Martins
University of the Arts London
London, United Kingdom

Nicola Mann
Richmond, The American
International University in London
London, United Kingdom

ISBN 978-3-319-45296-8

ISBN 978-3-319-45297-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017940527

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Cover image: Abstract Bricks and Shadows © Stephen Bonk/Fotolia.co.uk

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Rachel Mader, Head of the Competence Centre for Art and Design in Public Space, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Art.

Charlotte Bonham-Carter, Course Leader of MA Arts and Cultural Enterprise, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London.

Dr. Ana Yarto Bilbao, Research Fellow at the Afterall Research Centre, in Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London.

Dr. Tijen Tunali, Independent Researcher.

Dr. Andrés David Montenegro Rosero, Assistant Professor of Art History, Bridgewater State University.

Alicia Grullón, Artist.

Lawrence Bradby, Artist, Townley and Bradby.

Dr. Judith Stewart, Fine Art Lecturer and Research Degree Supervisor, Norwich University of the Arts.

Dr. Joey Orr, Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator for Research, part of the Integrated Arts Research Initiative at the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas.

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Introduction

Nicola Mann

Abstract The Introduction explains the rationale for a volume, highlighting the need for an interdisciplinary approach to social value and the arts. It describes the benefit of acknowledging the social, political, economic and artistic agendas that charge the cultural sector today. The editors explain the four constituent subsections that make up the volume: Part I *Policy*, Part II *Theory*, Part III *Practice and Artistic Responses*, and Part IV *Museum and Institutional Responses*. Parts I and II serve to map out the contextual foundations underpinning social value and the arts – both in terms of theory-based reflections and research on recent cultural policy – while Parts III and IV concern the lived experience of artists and arts institutions. Brief summaries of each chapter conclude the Introduction.

Keywords Rhetoric · Social value · Social practice art · Cultural policy · Interdisciplinary · Association of Art Historians (AAH)

Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts: But How Does It Work? is inspired by a session at the 2014 Association of Art Historians (AAH) conference at the Royal College of Art, London. Taking place just a month after the

N. Mann (✉)

Communications and Visual Cultures, American International University
in London, Richmond, UK

e-mail: nicola.mann@richmond.ac.uk

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value
and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_1

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publication of Arts Council England's (ACE's) evidence review, *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society* (2014), the discussions generated at this gathering marked a crucial moment of reflection about the mounting importance of social value and the arts in the cultural sector over recent years. While art as a tool to promote social agendas is far from a new phenomenon, today, many museums and galleries stand at the forefront of ever-expanding political and cultural efforts, becoming instruments of individual, community and societal support. In the UK, instrumental cultural policies have become the norm, and the arts are discussed in terms of their economic, social and political impact. As economic pressures rise, performance indicators such as "value for money" and "social impact" have entered into everyday arts administration discourse. In fact, valuing the arts in terms defined by non-arts agendas is now common practice internationally – from the creation of cultural quarters as a means of regenerating cities around the world, to the role of cultural diplomacy as a tool for improving intercultural relations.

Nonetheless, the obscure rhetoric surrounding the language of social value and inclusion – well-being, social justice and sustainability, etc. – has the potential to breed confusion and debate as to how to apply these principles. Measures to identify and evaluate the social value and success of participatory art projects complicate the situation even further. As Claire Bishop questions in her book, *Artificial Hells* (2012), under current conditions, do we judge the success of an artwork on ethical or aesthetic grounds? Bishop builds upon the tensions surrounding the overlap between activism and art outlined in Suzanne Lacy's *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1995), underscoring the lively and contestational nature of discussions surrounding social value and art. This volume situates itself centre stage within these debates and offers a platform to artists, scholars and arts programmers to reflect on the social, political, institutional and artistic conditions that inform their relationship with social value and the arts. Starting from the perspective of recent cultural policy, what follows is a gathering of reflections on how political agendas linked to social value interconnect with as well as challenge the lived experiences of artists and arts institutions. For instance, the final chapter in this volume ruminates on the practical implications of managing and curating "socially valuable" art in galleries and museums. Lifted out of the AAH's discussion rooms and into the pages of this book, we expand on conversations from the day in order to ask: *But How Does It Work (For You)?*

By providing a forum for specialists involved in social value and the arts to speak for themselves, this volume carves new academic ground in an area of

analysis often weighed down by confused thinking and misunderstanding. As the Chair of ACE, Sir Peter Bazalgette, acknowledges in the Foreword to the aforementioned report, one of the main problems with connecting the value of arts and culture “is finding the framework and language with which to express these benefits – creating the right lens through which this transforming ghost of art, everywhere but often invisible, at last shows up as an identifiable presence” (ACE, 2014, p. 5). The aim of our volume then is not to present a new theory on social practice, but rather to provide a variety of social, political, institutional and artistic *positions*. This range of voices enables the reader to forge their *own* connections and synergies between differing styles of rhetoric, critical outlook and processes as well as locating inherent dissonances and contradictions. While the subtitle of the project is *But How Does It Work?*, the conclusion of this investigation might easily be that it is impossible to pin down an understanding for a phenomenon that is as broad, multifaceted, interdisciplinary and dynamic as the relationship of art to society. Instead, this volume equates to a town hall meeting, a gathering that seeks to probe the nature of social value and the arts and its social, political, institutional and artistic implications.

Adopting a deliberately interdisciplinary approach, our volume also separates itself from existing publications on social value and the arts that stem from the field of art history and/or theory. Exhaustive undertakings such as Claire Bishop’s *Artificial Hells* (2012), Grant Kester’s *Conversation Pieces* (2013) and Pablo Helguera’s *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011) fulfil and enhance this area of enquiry. Unlike these monographs, ours is a short volume to fill in the gaps, inclusive of perspectives never previously presented or juxtaposed. Offering the insight of a cultural policy theorist as well as first-hand artists’ experiences, we curate a unique and previously underexplored dialogue. This volume seeks to challenge the reader to think creatively and intelligently; thus, we envisage its place on the shelves of students, academics and art world professionals alike. Pivoting off current contexts surrounding social value and the arts, this book asks: why have we seen an increased interest in the social value of art over the last two decades? Essentially, we ask: *Why Now?*

A BRIEF REFLECTION

While the primary focus of this volume focuses on contemporary reflections on the social value of the arts, it is necessary to recognize the strong art historical lineage underpinning socially engaged art in the form of a

brief critical reflection. The question of “Why Now?” draws attention to an artistic return to the art of human engagement, encounters that find themselves set against a broader twenty-first-century societal reliance on technology. Collaborative group gatherings generate uniquely three-dimensional public spectacles – extensions of the online “crowd culture” of Digital Natives (those born after 1980). Oscillating between connectivity and separation, ours is an age of spectacle, in which most of our social relationships are mediated electronically via the pixilated screens of social media platforms. While Twitter, Facebook and YouTube certainly help to expand traditional, unidirectional narrative structures, socially engaged art reaches out from behind the virtual interface of social media *space* to find worth in face-to-face encounters in real *place*. Artistic practices that involve the management of parades or demonstrations, or the creation of marketplaces, necessitate in-person human relationships that diminish the distinction between creator and spectator – an embrace of Joseph Beuys’s 1974 adage that “every living being is an artist” (Beuys, 1974). This is an oeuvre exemplified by the winners of the 2015 Turner Prize, a London-based collective named *Assemble*. With backgrounds spanning the fields of art, design and architecture, the group received the award for their ongoing collaboration with residents in the redevelopment of the run-down council housing area of Granby Four Streets, Liverpool. *Assemble* worked in tandem with the community to rebuild the formerly derelict area, training and employing local people to paint houses and to establish the Granby Workshop, a social enterprise making handmade products for homes. The project and its wares are documented in the form of slick websites (www.assemblestudio.co.uk and www.granbyworkshop.co.uk) and institutional recognition granted by the Turner Prize accolade, yet it is clear that the value of such art manifests itself *on the ground* in the form of face-to-face collaboration. Recipients of two Turner Prize “firsts” – *Assemble* are the first “non-artists” to receive the award, as well as the only “collective” to win in its 31-year history – this recent recognition exemplifies what Claire Bishop theorized as the “Social Turn” in art in 2006, as well as underscoring the timely nature of the discussions in this volume (Bishop, 2006).

Certainly, however, the notion of collaborative artistic practice is not a recent invention. Indeed, as Bishop more recently notes, artists are “*returning to the social*” (Bishop, 2012, p. 3). While complex discourses surrounding social value and the arts have emerged over the last two decades via the institutionalization of higher education programmes

such as the California College of Art's MFA in Social Practice (launched in 2005) and discussions about social practice as a medium generated in journals such as *Frieze* and *Artforum*, the histories of artist and participant co-authored experiences stretch back further. The historical trajectory of participatory art practice extends to the work of the Surrealists whose proponents staged interventions in Paris during the 1920s. Through the work of André Breton et al., art practice broke away from object-based studio endeavours, re-situating itself in the public sphere of politics and activism. Reflexive activities such as the Surrealists' weekly column for the French anarchist newspaper, *Le Libertaire*, highlight the political bent at the core of socially engaged art and the recognition of arts potential to serve as a catalyst for social change.

Such radical sociological and political ambition influenced the participatory and activist theatre of the Situationist International (SI), which existed from around 1957 to 1972. Influenced by Dada and Surrealism, the SI built upon Marxist thought in its anti-authoritarian stance. Guy Debord explored the political theory underpinning the organization in the seminal text, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Debord argued that society had become a series of spectacles and we, the public, had been reduced to a society of passive consumers. In commenting on contemporary consumer culture or, more importantly, commodity fetishism, Debord and the Situationists sought liberation in the practices of everyday life. Inspired by the SI, Allan Kaprow recognized the value of artistic Happenings – performances, events or situations where audience members became performers – as a way to draw attention to social ills and conditions. Set against the backdrop of the May 1968 student protests in France, figures like Kaprow and members of Fluxus turned collective action in the public sphere into art. In their negation of the alienation that accompanies the spectacle, Kaprow et al. pre-empted the anti-elitist social interventions generated by artists such as Tania Bruguera nearly 50 years later.

The 1970s produced a number of boundary-blurring art projects of social value that flourished outside the gallery and museum system. Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago's feminist art installation and performance space, *Womanhouse* (1972), echoed the explorations of everyday rituals and anti-hierarchical structures that dominated much second-wave feminist discourse at the time. Likewise, Mierle Laderman Ukeles challenged the domestic role of women, proclaiming herself a "maintenance artist" via works such as *Touch Sanitation* (1977–1980). Inspired by the

potential for art to stimulate empowerment amongst the most neglected of urban citizens, Ukeles shook the hands of and extended thanks to over 8,500 low-paid employees of the New York Sanitation Department. Recognizing sanitation as a primary maintenance system necessary for everyday survival, Ukeles methodically recorded her yearlong visits to 59 sanitation districts in the city in the form of a map. Ukeles's performance amounted to an act of solidarity that challenged the negative vernacular and stereotypes regularly attached to such employment.

As an unsalaried Artist-in-Residence in New York's Department of Sanitation (a position she holds to this day), Ukeles addresses not only linguistic stereotypes attached to maintenance workers but also the need to educate people about ecological sustainability in an urban context. In this sense, Ukeles's work has become a model for cities investing in artists as creative agents with social obligations. The responsibility of bringing "excluded" citizens back into participation in the social order aligns with the feminist moral theory, "the ethic of care" (Gilligan, 1982). This art of civic "maintenance" translates the value of otherwise semi-invisible tasks (care giving, respect and empathy) into curated acts. Eschewing presentation within the traditional gallery or museums setting, the artistic act amounts to a provocation to rethink our understanding of private and public space in the city, the structural power relations underpinning its management, as well as the labour value of its citizens. In other words, immaterial social artwork *becomes* artistic material. The legacy of Ukeles's commitment to bringing visceral, participatory experiences related to environmental management to its citizens can be felt in the work of Alicia Grullón in her chapter, "PERCENT FOR GREEN: Creating Space as Consciousness" (Chapter 7). Like Ukeles, Grullón utilizes education – in the form of workshops and talks about the impact of climate change – as a powerful tool to mobilize members of the public in active learning processes surrounding environmental issues in New York City (NYC).

Ukeles's 40-year commitment to the New York Department of Sanitation underscores the importance of time as a key organic component of socially engaged art making. As Tania Bruguera highlights in the form of her 7-year project *Catedra Arte de Conducta* (Behaviour Art School, 2002–2009) based in Havana, Cuba, the art of social engagement is often concerned with the *process* rather than the final *art* produced. An experiment in pedagogy, Bruguera's alternative art school aimed to create a space of alternative training to the system of art studies in Cuban society. Andrés David Montenegro Rosero's chapter, "*Arte de Conducta*: On

Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper Series*," discusses Bruguera's project in detail ([Chapter 6](#)). This kind of "Arte Útil" ("useful art"), as Bruguera terms it, is an art where participation is both a means and an end. In [Chapter 4](#), Ana Yarto Bilbao discusses useful art as a direct commitment to activist practices that intervene in the political reality of our society. Bilbao quotes Bruguera as follows:

Art is something that must be considered disposable, a means for other things, a protection layer. I understand there are artists that are consistent and that I respect [those] who focus on the search of new associative combinations, but this experience in itself, without a purpose outside the world of art, does not excite me. Art, as happens with a scientific discovery, should be seen in its applications. (Bruguera [2010](#), quoted pp. 61–62 by Bilbao)

Long-term interventions recognize the potential for art and civic action to intersect – to make a real and lasting difference – by creating local site-specific platforms via which to challenge power structures through social and political discussion.

In 1998 Nicolas Bourriaud expanded upon conversations surrounding the rhetoric connected to social interactions and art by coining the term, Relational Art. Framed as a form of constructive communal opposition to an overcommodified art world dominated by art fairs and biennales, Bourriaud defines Relational Art as "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (Bourriaud, 113). One of many terms used to categorize art of social value at the turn of the new millennium, Relational Art joins a list of identifiers including (but not limited to) participatory art, collective art, art of social cooperation and socially engaged art. The shifting linguistic definitions routinely and interchangeably applied to such practices call attention to the puzzled thinking often generated by discussions surrounding social value and the arts. Indeed, Bourriaud's examination of relational experiences in conceptual work such as that produced by Liam Gillick and Gillian Wearing should not be confused with explicitly political works that seek to disrupt capitalist society and challenge the system in the form of protests, revolts and uprisings. Tijen Tunali ruminates on the latter via the work of artists including Buruk Delier as well as this recent history of rhetorical imprecision in [Chapter 5](#).

Upon entering the twenty-first century, artistic progress in the (now genre) socially engaged art found itself newly positioned in relationship to shifts in cultural policy towards social inclusion. While community arts projects of the 1960s and 1970s drew inspiration from the spirit of the Civil Rights movement, feminism and counterculture – firmly situating their practice in a counter-institutional framework – institutions and practitioners today find themselves working in tandem with and in response to the same instrumental cultural policies. In 2004, Eleonora Belfiore devised the term “Instrumental Turn” to describe the moment in which UK cultural policy became explicit about valuing culture in non-cultural terms (2004, p. 187). For example, in February 2013 the UK government launched the Social Value Act – a new policy requiring public authorities to place social and environmental value above economic agendas. This legislation marked the apex of an increasing emphasis over recent years in the cultural sector, both in the UK and globally, towards social value. As we have seen, art as a tool to promote social agendas is far from a new phenomenon; however, since the 1990s, artists and institutions have been under mounting pressure to quantify the social and political benefit of their art practice/s. Claire Bishop points out that in the European context the rhetoric of “social practice” coincides with an overtly neoliberal agenda of replacing government-run social services with volunteers offering creative entrepreneurial solutions. Charlotte Bonham-Carter (Chapter 3) and Rachel Mader (Chapter 2) expand on Bishop’s discussion, focusing on the social value of art alongside the neoliberal state and New Labour politics.

Consequently, as it is theorized, the genre often becomes indistinguishable from simple museum outreach, or any other individual, community and societal supports with some creative connection. From Lee Mingwei’s *Seer Project* (2003) at Harvard University, to Thomas Hirshhorn’s *Gramsci Monument* (2013), a Dia Art Foundation commission in the South Bronx, New York, artists increasingly assume the responsible role of social architect. And in so doing, the question emerges: is the art of social value not just semi-aestheticized social work, therapy, urban planning or plain old activism? The potential tensions between outreach efforts as opposed to “real” art are just one of the many issues discussed within the context of social value in this volume. In other words, where does the “social project” stop and the “social art” begin?

As cultural intermediaries, museums have often had to confront the challenge of responding to such an indeterminate question. Indeed, the

practical implications of managing and curating “socially valuable” art in galleries and museums have generated much debate, as have the necessary architectural and design responses to participatory art practices. Joey Orr’s chapter, “Collecting Social Things” (Chapter 9), for example, discusses issues connected to the preservation of interactive installations, architectural propositions, public actions and instances of community organizing – events that fall under the remit of socially engaged art. The potential artistic and organizational contradictions attached to the display, support and purchase of socially and politically engaged work – art not originally destined for institutional display – also generate critical reflection in this volume. The tensions that persist between political activism and artistic representation demonstrate that while the social value of art tends to have one meaning in the context of artistic practice it can have quite another within the context of cultural policy; and yet, as the work of *Assemble* highlights, neither are mutually exclusive.

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

Despite our pluralistic intentions, it is necessary to tether our discussion in the form of four constituent subsections: Part I *Policy*, Part II *Theory*, Part III *Practice and Artistic Responses*, and Part IV *Museum and Institutional Responses*. Each of these parts addresses the increasing importance of social value in the arts in recent years, both in the UK and internationally. The chapters in each part focus around a specific analytic frame or set of orienting concerns. At the same time, each chapter can be read independently from the other contributions in this volume.

Part I draws together two chapters that contextualize the landscape of cultural policy as it pertains to social value in the UK. The main concern for the chapters in this section is to offer the reader examples of key organizational debates connected to social impact evidence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In this sense, they provide a structural frame for considering the administrative agendas to which the art projects and organizations described in the subsequent chapters occasionally find themselves beholden. Rachel Mader begins this discussion with the chapter, “Who Sets the Agenda? Changing Attitudes Towards the Relevance of Small-Scale Contemporary Visual Arts Organisations in the UK.” From an examination of the formation of London’s Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in 1949, through to an analysis of the work of the London-based arts organization Artangel, Mader charts a growing commitment to social relevance in small-scale organizations

during the latter part of the twentieth century in the UK. While “social relevance” as a key category of cultural politics can be traced back to the structural implementation of the Arts Council in the post-war years, Mader elucidates on the more recent shift towards debates surrounding “evidence-based” analysis, that is, measurable facts and data. Utilizing policy documents and impact studies, including annual reports from organizations including Arts Catalyst, Mader interrogates the competing ideological discourses surrounding the pressures of evaluation, problematizing the process itself by asking “Who Sets the Agenda?”

Charlotte Bonham-Carter builds on Mader’s discussion surrounding cultural policy in the UK, focusing on the slippery nature of New Labour’s social value agenda in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the infiltration of new principles in public sector management in the cultural sector. “From Social Inclusion to Audience Numbers: Art Museums in the New Public Management” contends that the New Labour administration failed to offer a clear explanation of the specific ways in which museums and galleries should contribute to social inclusion, and yet, at the same time, demanded hard evidence of their social impact. According to the author, this created a situation in which audience numbers – one of the only data sets that could be gathered relatively quickly and cheaply – became a prominent proxy indicator of social inclusion. The chapter concludes that the political and administrative climate of the time is a useful framework for understanding how the collection of audience numbers became a key data set for museums and galleries.

In Part II of this volume, the analytical focus shifts from cultural policy to theoretical reflections on the issue of social value and the arts. Drawing from scholars including Theodor Adorno, Hal Foster and Jacques Rancière, Ana Yarto Bilbao problematizes the notion of Political Art, a concept that re-emerged from the so-called Social Turn in art during the 1990s. Titled, “Rethinking the Social Turn: The Social Function of Art as Functionless and Anti-Social,” the chapter seeks to clarify the rhetorical indeterminacy underlying contemporary conceptions of Political Art. Bilbao does so by positing the concept in direct opposition to Rancière’s theory of the Politics of Aesthetics, contending that the restrictive use-values placed on Political Art threaten its transformative potential. Instead, via an analysis of artists including Tania Bruguera, the author makes the case for art that is functionless and anti-social.

In “The Paradoxical Engagement of Contemporary Art with Anti-Capitalism, Activism, and Protest” Tijen Tunali builds on Bilbao’s discussion

surrounding the aestheticization of politics. Like Bilbao, Tunali calls for an expanded appreciation of socially engaged art, one that elides the process-based nature of “community-based art” on one end of the spectrum and the institutional critiques volleyed at such work when exhibited at the other. Rather, the author defines a third category of engaged art: the art that we encounter on the street during protests, revolts and uprisings. Produced for and/or on the streets, the ephemeral nature of “protest art” evades questions of social, political and aesthetic viability and resists the systematization of corporate logic. Drawing from artists including Burak Delier and theorists including Rancière, Tunali highlights the tensions that persist between political activism and artistic representation. For the author, aestheticization of politics leads to spectacularization of art to make political ideologies attractive, while the politicization of aesthetics strips art of its autonomy. Yet, according to Tunali, “protest art” is not trapped in the paradox of aestheticization of politics and politicization of aesthetics; rather, it breeds and flourishes in this position.

The third coupling of chapters in this volume focuses on the position of the artist as facilitator of social change. The first of which, Andrés David Montenegro Rosero’s “*Arte de Conducta: On Tania Bruguera’s Tatlin’s Whisper Series*,” explores Bruguera’s work as an artistic practice that transcends the realm of art to become a part of everyday life. For example, Rosero discusses how Bruguera’s *Arte de Conducta* (Behavioral Art Department), 2002–2009, was informed by her engagement with the *Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante*, a short-lived correctional project that sought to re-educate and reintegrate Cuban youths into society. Bruguera’s desire to impart change through behavioural interventions informs Rosero’s analysis of the artist’s *Tatlin’s Whisper* series (2009 and 2014). Of particular concern to Rosero are the ways in which the work activates well-known images from the past for a tactical re-evaluation of the present, thus highlighting the growing relationship today between apathy and anaesthetization of images in the mass media. For Rosero, the works dismantle specific historical and political imaginaries in order to catalyse a critical awareness of the present and, by extension, change the future.

The second chapter in this section, “PERCENT FOR GREEN: Creating Space as Consciousness,” reflects on the connections between the pressing issue of climate change and community arts engagement in the Bronx, NYC. As a long-term resident of the South Bronx, artist, Alicia Grullón, has first-hand experience of the borough’s heavy pollution and

resultant high asthma rates. Modelled on NYC's Percent for Art legislation that allots 1% of the budget on public art for eligible city-funded construction projects, this chapter recounts Grullón's in-progress campaign for a parallel commitment to expanding green spaces and sustainable initiatives such as low-income housing. Framed by photographs taken at PERCENT FOR GREEN events, this chapter provokes questions surrounding the positioning of socio-political grassroots activism and community discussion-making as art.

We conclude our volume with two chapters that deal with the specific ways in which institutions handle and mishandle their relationship to social arts practice. Part IV, *Museum and Institutional Responses*, begins with Lawrence Bradby and Judith Stewart's chapter, "Artists on the Gallery Payroll: A Case Study and a Corporate Turn." Adopting a conversational format, this contribution reveals the authors' first-hand experience of the multiple agendas at play within museums and galleries when art intersects with social value. At Firstsite, a contemporary art gallery in Essex, Stewart developed strategies to support artists' critical practice, whilst Bradby helped non-artists to stage a number of projects inside and outside the gallery. Employed as an Associate Artist, Bradby's stable long-term position within the organization offers a comparison to other more ephemeral roles that artists take up on behalf of galleries. However, the chapter raises key questions related to the embedding of artists within the gallery system and employment practices surrounding community projects more generally.

Joey Orr's final chapter "Collecting Social Things" shifts away from the point of view of the artist to that of the institution itself in order to discuss the challenges of accumulating socially engaged art and housing it in museum collections. Orr asks: how might collections preserve and meditate on the "object," so to speak, of social engagement? Furthermore, Orr questions the unwieldy nature of the "object" itself, which may take the form of interactive installations, architectural propositions, public actions and community organizing. Reflecting on the thin material traces left after performances such as Tino Sehgal's *Kiss* (2002), the chapter questions: what is the thing that is being collected, presented or interpreted exactly?

As you will now appreciate, this volume – mirroring the artwork it discusses – is relational and participatory. The dialogical nature of

Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts is due in no small part to the fact that its creation was informed by a session at the College Arts Association (CAA) conference in Washington, DC, 2016. Organized as a follow-up session to the AAH gathering mentioned at the start of this Introduction, the session, titled *The Institutionalisation of Social Practice*, sought to (1) consider the practical implications of managing socially valuable art in galleries and museums and, (2) reflect on the critical issue of competitive arts funding and the increasing pressures on today's artists to embrace social value. Two contributors to the CAA conference, Ana Yarto Bilbao and Joey Orr, provide chapters in this volume, while Bilbao connects the 2014 AAH conference, the 2016 CAA conference and this publication, as she participates in all three. The fact that this volume draws from two such diverse gatherings (at least in terms of time and space) underscores the long-held interdisciplinary motivations at the root of this volume, the international scope of our analysis, as well as reasserting the prevailing interest in the social value of the arts within the arts and cultural sector.

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Nicola Mann is Assistant Professor of Communications and Visual Cultures at Richmond, The American International University in London. She holds an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art, London, and received a PhD in Visual and Cultural Studies from the University of Rochester, New York.

PART I

Policy

Who Sets the Agenda? Changing Attitudes Towards the Relevance of Small-Scale Visual Arts Organisations in the UK

Rachel Mader

Abstract This text traces the changing attitudes and arguments to social relevance at stake in and used by small-scale visual arts organisations. It seeks to identify who first presented ‘relevance’, as a means of legitimisation, and to establish at what point this occurred, with what intentions, and through what structures was it monitored. It becomes apparent that relevance describes an extremely varied and complex constellation of values and that demonstrating this multi-layered notion of value is central for the continued existence of the institutions that are the subject of evaluations. The contrast in the knowledge economy between the bustling research activity of the Arts Council and the as yet largely lacking exploration of the complexity and achievements of small-scale visual arts organisations prove to be especially problematic.

Keywords Small-scale arts organisations · Institutional studies · Cultural policies · Evaluation

R. Mader (✉)

Art Researcher, University of Lucerne, Luzern, Switzerland
e-mail: rachel.mader@hslu.ch

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_2

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When a new art institution is founded, “relevance” is often cited as the central argument in its favour. How this touchstone is defined, however, takes many forms and is becoming increasingly complex. In their study, *The Social Impact of the Arts* (2010), Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett trace the intellectual history of the connection between arts and social impact and insist that the discussion surrounding it over the past few decades has narrowed considerably in terms of content and method: “Historically speaking, ‘instrumentalism’ is around 2500 years old, as old as civilisation itself; what is new, however, is the fixation on measurement and ‘proven effects.’” Furthermore Belfiore points out that this statement is particularly true for the UK, where “pronounced instrumentalism is a hallmark of (...) cultural politics” (Belfiore 2010, 10).

Despite a highly developed critique of this methodical focus within the UK, “instrumentalism” nevertheless dominates discussion about the relevance of art and appears overpowering to the people concerned. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt describes it as “the tyranny of measurement” in her study *Value, Measure, Sustainability: Ideas towards the future of the small-scale visual arts sector* (2012). Commissioned by Common Practice, an “advocacy group for (...) the small-scale contemporary visual arts sector,” in 2009, this analysis points out the acute problems that small arts organisations in particular are facing, as a consequence of such evaluations (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012, 7).

The following text traces the changing attitudes to social relevance at stake in and used by individual institutions. It also covers the arguments that support the idea of social relevance as an important consideration for contemporary institutions. It seeks to identify who first presented “relevance,” as a means of legitimisation, and to establish at what point this occurred, with what intentions and through what structures was it monitored. It becomes apparent that relevance describes an extremely varied and complex constellation of values and that demonstrating this multilayered notion of value is central for the continued existence of the institutions that are the subject of evaluations.

RELEVANCE FOR THE ARTS

The founders of the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) displayed their commitment to the social significance of art by raising their audience’s awareness through public events. Soon after its foundation, the new Institute organised a variety of public forums, of which the first in 1949 was entitled “Is Art an Essential or an Accessory to Society.”¹ When another

public discussion took place a year later, on April 18, 1950, on the theme of “The Functions and Aims of an Institute of Contemporary Art,” its starting point was the concrete functions that the soon-to-be inhabited new building should fulfil as part of their interdisciplinary initiative.² The theme of “social relevance” had a strong presence in their early activities: it reoccurred as a meta-theoretical debate in various exhibitions and accompanying events and constituted a core part of the Institute’s (self-) image, described by Ben Cranfield, who was research fellow at the ICA at that time, in his short essay for the publication commemorating the 60th anniversary of the institution as its “discursive role” (Cranfield 2007, 10).

The founders of the ICA seem to have paid more intense attention however, to those moments of social significance that could be considered inherent to their specific concerns and had direct consequences for the everyday running of the organisation. This refers mainly to their explicitly stated commitment to a new kind of space for cooperative, experimental and non-established artistic production, which they strove to make accessible to a wider public. Their initiative was focused on the art context and decisions were made accordingly. Their decision to use the term “institute” instead of “museum,” for example, a position that was arrived at after a lengthy and controversial debate marked a terminological boundary against an artistic conservatism.

The inclusion of functional spaces such as a library, and what was originally referred to as an information room for events and (later) a café, was a measure intended to ensure that the institute would be used in a way that was as open and inclusive as possible. The heated debates about member contributions and the annual general meetings which were earnestly held for the first few years at least were further measures taken by the organisation in an attempt to ensure that it fulfilled its social responsibility to its own context, the national and international art scene.³

Well into the 1970s, an institution’s relevance within this scene was considered solely in relation to ideas and demands that were formulated within the art system. Even initiatives with completely different orientations, such as Matt’s Gallery, founded by Robin Klassnik in 1979 on Martello Street in the East End, or ACME Studios founded by Jonathan Harvey and David Panton with the goal of providing “affordable studios and living space” for art workers, argued for their activities solely with reference to inadequacies within the art field. In the case of Matt’s Gallery, the aim was to create a setting adapted to the process-based work of art production by young artists,⁴ while ACME acted from sheer necessity in

the face of a lack of affordable studios.⁵ Initiatives by artists with an even more decidedly social orientation also insisted on an artistic independence that should not be assessed according to values established in other areas of society. This is true of Stephen Willats' interventions in social space,⁶ as well as the positions for artists in the business and administrative sectors that were organised by the Artist Placement Group, or the artistic approaches assembled by a team around Nicholas Serota in 1978, for the exhibition "Art for Society" at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. The catalogue published on the occasion of this exhibition presented "art which is both socially and aesthetically relevant" (Serota 1978, 5), and the texts included document a fundamental, preliminary attempt to trace and define the relationship of art to its social contexts.

RELEVANCE AT THE CROSSROADS: FROM CURATORIAL SETTING TO POLITICAL CLAIM

A decade later these discussions began to change fundamentally. A claim of social relevance had become an explicit inclusion in curatorial statements and was frequently codified in the guiding principles of individual institutions. Artangel's first leaflet, for example, included "relevant" among their aims as a "production and promotion company," explaining their position in terms of "supporting artists whose ideas address issues of broad social interest." Range of appeal was indicated as a further goal under the keyword "popular," which in view of their third goal, to present "contemporary artworks in prominent locations," implied a mission to advocate for content as well as to appeal to potential funders by ensuring them that their support would impact a wide audience.⁷ This double function appears accurate for two reasons: firstly, Artangel especially during its early days, before the directorship of James Lingwood and Michael Morris from 1991, presented itself primarily as a service provider. The curatorial aspects, which later became characteristic of the agency, seemed of secondary importance. Secondly, the establishment of Artangel coincided with the Thatcher government's movement towards neoliberal politics and decision-making processes, which were nearly always driven by underlying questions of economic viability. The previously rather autonomous discourse around the field of art, which was based upon notions of "excellence," was increasingly replaced with insistent demands for art to be more economically viable, for example, by achieving widespread impact and visibility.

For the small contemporary arts organisation, Beaconsfield, which was founded at around the same time as Artangel, the situation was different in many respects. The organisation's self-perception was rooted in a passion for experimental and interdisciplinary art practices; they wished to provide a space for the development and presentation of these practices, while also inspiring an audience to engage with this kind of art. "Education," "outreach" and "dialogue" were among the terms listed by founders Naomi Siderfin and David Crawford in their policy documents to justify the aims of their activity with regard to possible social contexts.⁸ And it was precisely these educational aspects that quickly emerged as a challenge. Especially when, following structural consolidation under the name Beaconsfield, these declared intentions returned in the form of demands from government funders. The implementation of these high-minded intentions also brought about further difficulties, for example, in the course of their attempts to get the local residents of Vauxhall excited about their productions, which were often of an artistically daring nature. Their focus on little-known artists also increased the need for educational activities, especially since Beaconsfield had set itself the goal of overcoming the gap between the art scene and a wider public. Though intended to reduce social inequalities, the increasingly comprehensive requirements from the Arts Council generated a constantly growing burden of administrative tasks, not just for Beaconsfield but also for a range of other institutions in the sector. Directors Siderfin and Crawford responded by producing one document after another defining their "outreach strategy"⁹ or approach to "audience development,"¹⁰ positioning themselves on issues such as "cultural diversity"¹¹ and "equal opportunities," or creating a "Disability Action Plan."¹² The complete withdrawal of government support for Beaconsfield for the 2015–18 period comes therefore as a surprise as this decision can't be justified on the grounds that the organisation did not meet the requested criteria. The major increase that Artangel received at the same time leads to the assumption that the social compatibility of the institution isn't, in fact, the key factor of Art Council's decisions, but rather the extent to which the organisation engages with spectacular, large-scale public projects, perhaps.

CRITIQUE AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

On the website of the London-based interdisciplinary cluster Critical Practice, they state their intentions: "We will explore the field of cultural production as a site of resistance to the logic, power and values of the

ideology of a competitive market.” The cluster of organisations that constitute Critical Practice further elaborate the social context of their activity: “We are concerned by the threat of the instrumentalisation of the artistic field by a wholesale internalisation of corporate values, methods and models. This can be seen everywhere from art schools, to museums and galleries, and even the studios of artists!”¹³ The group makes resistance its mission because it finds its potential threatened in the face of the looming appropriation of cultural practices by economic logic. This diagnosis suggests a system fundamentally different from that of the 1970s. Art theorist Isabelle Graw makes a similar point when she describes how the field of art intersects with other social fields in ways that have never been seen before and coins the term “relative heteronomy” with reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of a relative autonomy of the field of art (Graw 2008, 152–55). Social relevance has become one of the most important currencies circulating among art producers, institutions, cultural policy makers and the art market, who also have very different interests at stake. Art has lost the intrinsic value that remained at least implicitly attributed to it until the last third of the twentieth century, in ways that fundamentally affect its self-determination, rendering it subject to continuous negotiation in an obscurely organised power field.

Initiatives that started in the 2000s are conscious of this situation and have developed a substantial, reflective awareness of its complexity, as well as a multiplicity of strategies, tactics and arguments to position themselves within this tangled and ambiguous constellation of interests. The embrace of critical self-awareness as the starting point of all art-related activity has superseded the political consciousness of the 1970s and has now been established as an almost canonical element of the self-representation of independent practitioners in the field. The protagonists of the Serpentine Gallery’s Edgware Road project also operate within the matrix sketched earlier and demonstrate a characteristically contemporary way of engaging with this situation. The project’s main interest was to generate interaction with the local neighbourhood, not by providing access to art or through documentation, but by encouraging the active participation of local residents. The problems inherent in this approach, namely that these critical intentions can easily be integrated into the official political agenda, are recognised and actively addressed by the organisers, and discussed publicly through publications and events. Their working methods are implemented with precise attention to the specificity of the local context. This includes the decision to implement a long-term, open-ended project,¹⁴

as well as rigorous reflection on the modes of cooperation between curators, invited artists and the target group in any particular project.¹⁵ All this suggests a down-to-earth view of the role and function of artistic practices, described by O'Neill and Doherty as “semi-autonomous modes of participation for both artist and the communities with which they work” (O'Neill and Doherty 2011, 209).

Nevertheless, we repeatedly see a clear commitment to the specific potentials of art, as manifested in curator Janna Graham's description of the Centre for Possible Studies the structural format of the project as a “temporary autonomous zone,” a term coined by Hakim Bey to refer to a place where the dominant rules of society may be temporarily suspended or at least destabilised (Graham 2012, 1213). The notion of a “temporary autonomous zone” is specific to contemporary art activity of the twenty-first century, where curatorial (and artistic) activities are examined, categorised and legitimised, often with considerable theoretical backup. Although these texts don't fall within the discourse type of evaluation, they frequently take on similar functions: beyond a reflective description of the socio-theoretical context and sketches of often visionary ideas for a better society, these texts deliver substantial, theoretically grounded arguments that are then cited by all those involved, including all kinds of funders, to explain their participation or support.

COMPETING DISCOURSES: EVALUATIONS AND CONCEPTS

Engaging with current debates around the value of art is a central aspect of claiming relevance, and contemporary initiatives especially are very aware of this. In 2009 a handful of smaller, London-based art institutions founded Common Practice. The group stated that their aims included raising awareness of the value of these institutions and their activities and strengthening this often disregarded aspect of the art business through dialogue and networking.¹⁶ So far, these intentions have resulted in three studies and two conferences. These have asked how, principally, the work done by these small institutions should be evaluated and how their value can be increased, in the context of the entire field, which, in the first study, is termed the “arts ecology.” This study pointed primarily to the lack of sufficient criteria through which to approach the specific qualities and achievements of the “small scale contemporary visual arts sector” (Thelwall 2011, 9). According to Sarah Thelwall, author of the study, this lack of criteria has direct effects on funding opportunities.

In the second study, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt ventures a critical reading of the theses proposed in Thelwall's paper, with reference to a conference involving a large group of small-scale art institutions that took place between the two studies. It appears that some fundamental objections to Thelwall's narrative were voiced at the conference. The critique was aimed on the one hand against the description of the art system as an "ecology," a metaphor that implies a naturalisation of the socio-economic circumstances. On the other hand, it questioned the implicit categorisation of small institutions as the lowest rung of a hierarchy (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012, 5). These criticisms point to two central aspects of the discussion that are concerned with the question of value and which are themselves closely interconnected: respectively the evaluation of the achievements of this sector and the discursive setting within which these are to be qualified and acknowledged.¹⁷ As a result, these two aspects were also central to the conference organised by Common Practice, "Public Assets: Small-Scale Art Organisations and the Production of Value," which took place in February 2015.

The terms chosen by the speakers to describe the situation and the resulting agenda are explicit and surprisingly combative. Andrea Philips, co-organiser of the conference, insisted on the necessity of reclaiming terms such as "engagement" or "public participation," which were once used predominantly by small art institutions, but have since been appropriated by capital, specifically the "art industry" (Philips 2015, 7'30"). Maria Lind, who reported on her curatorial practice at the Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm, even spoke of a "clash of different kind of values" in which the institutional landscape of art currently finds itself entangled. While avoiding the dominant criteria altogether would be almost impossible, Lind argued, it should certainly be attempted to try to change "the amount of evaluation" as well as "the terms according to which we, as art institutions are being evaluated" (Lind 2015, 23'40").

The various interests of different actors in the field have become particularly visible in terms of evaluation, which has become an increasingly important activity in the art world, as it has in other fields, over the last years and decades, as a way of determining and assessing achievements, effectiveness and value. The Arts Council plays a central role in this development: on the one hand its support is conditional on increasingly sophisticated methods of evaluation, while on the other hand, it increasingly focuses these evaluations, as well as its own research activity, on measurable aspects of evaluation that seem more straightforward in terms of application and communication.¹⁸

This shift in cultural-political mentality created the framework within which individual institutions were and are still expected to operate. The reports and supporting evidence on which the Arts Council bases its funding procedure became more detailed and elaborate in general, with a particularly pronounced increase during the Thatcher years, leading to a sharp rise in administration both for the Council as well as the institutions faced with additional justification requirements.¹⁹

This shift becomes visible in the Arts Council's treatment of, and responses to, applications submitted by institutions. The first financial grants awarded to the ICA in the late 1940s were dealt with in a noticeably informal and individual manner. While the Institute asked exclusively for support for exhibitions in the first three years, which the Arts Council approved in brief notes of confirmation, the plan for a designated space was also recommended for a supporting grant of 1000 GBP by the Art Director at the time, Philip James. Attached to his report was the ICA's single-page budget, which balanced spending of 6000 GBP with an income of only 3237 GBP. Despite this predicted deficit, the Council's support for the ICA was never in doubt. James justified this by simply stating, "that the Institute are performing useful work in the field of contemporary art."²⁰

Even in the 1970s, after the Arts Council had undergone not a complete reorganisation, but at least various structural extensions, the grants for institutions were manageable in a way that allowed for the same model of a brief and individual evaluation. For the 1976–77 period the list of funded institutions comprised 11 institutions that might be described as the "small-scale visual arts organisations" of their time. All their applications for support were addressed in a few short paragraphs: the specific issues of the individual organisations were briefly contextualised, the recommendation that followed usually involved small reductions to the amount requested, but never outright rejection. There were no overarching evaluation criteria; approval was based primarily on an informed consideration of the interplay of qualitative and cultural-political parameters.²¹ The decidedly political resolve "to consolidate and extend the network of visual arts centres, primarily devoted to the exhibition of contemporary art"²² provided a basis for positive evaluation of applications from the late 1960s onwards²³ and is also the reason for the noticeably sympathetic treatment received by the Whitechapel Art Gallery since the late 1970s. Several times a year from his instatement as Director in 1976 Nicholas Serota saw the need to explain the precarious financial

situation of the institution to the Arts Council in a personal letter, asking for an advance or additional grants. That these requests were approved across the board, if not always for the full amount, was due both to his good connections at the Arts Council²⁴ as well as the significance of the Whitechapel in the still sparse network of contemporary art institutions in the late 1970s. Discussion about the justification for these requests was limited to a few concerns, and the allocation of responsibilities seemed to be largely settled: while the Arts Council concentrated on cultural-political considerations, the foundation boards were in charge of organisational affairs, and the responsibility for content-related decisions was overwhelmingly left to the respective directors.²⁵

In the early 1990s this situation changed radically: the legitimising discourse at the juncture between cultural politics and individual institutions not only expanded drastically, but roles and formats also began to change in important ways. The documents of individual institutions suggest, however, that at this point the claim to social relevance had already been firmly established and even assimilated into institutions' perceptions of their own roles and responsibilities. An exemplary case is the "Evaluation Report" in which Nicola Triscott and Vivienne Glance, the founders of Arts Catalyst, examined and assessed their two pilot years. Since they received a grant by the Gulbenkian Foundation and employed "monitoring and self-evaluation systems set up with the advice of the Charities Evaluation Service (CES)" they concluded their 2-year pilot phase for *SUPERNOVA science-art project* with a 23-page report. This document gives details on the context of their project, its aims, planning process and the implementation of the programme. It includes deviations from the plans and the reasons for these, collaborations and educational efforts, communication and promotion strategies, visitor numbers broken down according to different criteria, equal opportunities guidelines and of course details of funding, fundraising and sponsorship, as well as various appendices listing reviews and quoting visitor responses, and finally concluding reflections on whether the approach of SUPERNOVA and the organisational setting they developed were suited to continuation in a more permanent form.²⁶ The categories applied for evaluation largely conform to the criteria established by the Arts Council for applications by so-called regularly funded organisations, to which Arts Catalyst belonged during the 2001–02 period. The information about the organisation it required is not, as the term suggests, content neutral. Rather, even seemingly descriptive statements carry the traces of various political discourses, which cannot, however, be assigned to any one political faction.

Political change thus resulted not primarily in different claims, but mainly in an increase of politically charged demands at the expense of more engagement with content or quality.

Common Practice's publication "Value, Measure, Sustainability: Ideas Towards the Future of the Small-Scale Visual Arts Sector" as well as their conference "Public Assets: Small-Scale Arts Organisation and the Production of Value" react to the developments described previously with a call for evaluation criteria generated with reference to art and the social rather than politics and the economy.²⁷ Andrea Philips describes this potential shift as working with and on concepts that must be (re-)appropriated or newly introduced to the discussion. While official forms (be they applications or the self-assessments mentioned) provide little opportunity for developing alternative narratives, evaluative genres composed by the organisations themselves offer more scope for a description of relevance that represents the complexity of social demands. This is demonstrated by the four "Impact Studies" created by the independent arts organisation Peckham Space to review its first few years of activity. These are short, condensed reports that present the wishes and expectations for the project as well as the results with reference to the different interests of the various parties involved (e.g. the university, local residents and businesses, and the Peckham Space itself). The aims of this analysis as summarised in the introduction are considerable and refer to the various lines of discourse that the Peckham Space intended to engage with:

The impact measuring process was designed to ensure that Peckham Space would be able to demonstrate how it had delivered public value, justifying the level of investment it received from the University, Southwark Council and the Arts Council England. It is also designed to provide the staff of Peckham Space and their managers with a body of knowledge about what has worked and what future opportunities there may be. Furthermore, it aimed to capture the development of the unique identity of the Space and show how its work contributes to the achievement of wider social objectives contained in public policy. A broader long-term goal is to influence debate and developments about how the Higher Education sector engages with regeneration policy and social inclusion in an urban area such as Peckham.²⁸

Accordingly, the themes and methods with which various aspects of the space's activity are examined and appraised are very diverse. The beginning of the report is unusual, reflecting on themes that surfaced during the first

year but were not in a narrow sense included among the aims formulated in advance. The second section is dedicated to congruities with the official political agenda or “national policy,” “regeneration” as well as “education and learning.”²⁹ This is followed by a short section on the benefits for the local area, ranging from the activation and extension of residents’ skills to positive media reports about Peckham, intensified exchange between various “stakeholders” such as the university, the residents and businesses, to the enhancement of the central square in the neighbourhood.³⁰ These and other effects are substantiated with selected statistics.³¹ In conclusion, the results of the analysis are evaluated in accordance with the three central aims at the core of the initiative. These include building sustainable partnerships between the participants involved, promoting access to art and increasing active engagement by local residents, especially for young people, as well as creating opportunities for the professional development of students.³² In all three of these areas it is determined that there are satisfying, positive effects or at least motivational first steps. Thus Emily Druiff, director of Peckham Space, concludes her appraisal with the wish to continue to develop the project.

The increasingly condensed follow-up analyses over the next two years continue the same basic structure and come to similarly positive conclusions, leading Druiff to optimistically view the step into independence following the 4-year pilot project under the wings of Camberwell College: “As we move into 2014, our new independent status promises an exciting future” (Brett et al. 2010–11, 3). The inclusion of Peckham Platform in the Arts Council’s list of “National Portfolio Organisations” for the period 2015–18 suggests that she was not alone in her assessment. This development renders the concerns about the funding agenda voiced during the initial stages of the project by Natalie Brett, the Coordinator on behalf of the University, strangely obsolete:

During these times of changing government policy and the implications this has for funding, Camberwell College of Arts and University of the Arts London must clearly show our commitment to widening access to higher education. Peckham Space is an essential part of this work, and working in a climate in which funding is typically being either reduced or completely removed requires that we are constantly looking at ways to be innovative. (Brett et al. 2010–11, 1)

The call to innovation, itself a product of neoliberal strategies, is thus proclaimed as an alternative to an unreliable model of cultural politics.

These intentions in the end achieved recognition through public funding, enabling them while simultaneously refuting their original claim.

Such contradictory or at least complex conditions are typical of the current circumstances, whereby institutions must argue with various groups and individuals defending different interests. They are compelled to do this within a context that is the result of an ongoing discussion featuring the demands of different, and often opposed parties, rather than one political voice. In addition to this, there is also an insistence on quantifiable values within the discourse about the relevance of work of small-scale contemporary arts organisations and is part of a political agenda that operates with so-called pseudo-quantities that seem to describe the outcomes but in fact not only represent a reductionist perspective, but are arbitrary and often misleading.³³ It is clear that the polyphony of voices that is defining the conditions not just of the art world as a whole, but also the conditions within institutions themselves can't be represented by quantitative measurements, but instead require flexible methods which give voice to the variety of attitudes that make up the institutional landscape. The question of who sets the agenda is dependent not only on a political momentum of change but also on the disposal of a different kind of knowledge. There is a telling contrast in this knowledge economy between the bustling research activity of the Arts Council and the currently inadequate investigation into the complexity and achievements of small-scale visual arts organisations.

NOTES

1. The public event took place on December 6, 1949, at the ICA. The heterogeneous composition of the panel produced a polyphony of opinions. The list assembled by the group comprehensively includes almost every function imaginable at the time. Summary notes are available in the archive of the ICA.
2. Summary notes on this event are available in the archive of the ICA.
3. The minutes of the general meetings where these discussions are documented are available in the archive of the ICA.
4. A short history of the early days of Matt's Gallery by Robert Grayson, written as a memoir in 2008, is accessible on the website of the gallery: <http://www.mattsgallery.org/history/presenttense.php>
5. A descriptive summary of the early years of ACME Studios is available on their website: <http://www.acme.org.uk/aboutacme>

6. Compare, for example, the “West London Social Resource Project,” as well as “The Oxford Insight Development Project,” both documented in the publication Willats, 1973.
7. The leaflet is available in Artangel’s archive.
8. These terms are found in a number of their early policy documents, be they mission statements or policy statements. See, for example, the minutes of the meeting of January 27, 1995, in Beaconsfield’s digital archive.
9. As discussed at the annual general meeting on November 13, 1997. Minutes are available in Beaconsfield’s digital archive.
10. As discussed at the meeting of October 7, 1998. Minutes are available in Beaconsfield’s digital archives.
11. This point was particularly criticised since it heightened the risk of introducing “positive discrimination.” Discussed at the meeting of December 11, 2002. Minutes are available in Beaconsfield’s digital archive.
12. Drafts for these plans were included with the invitation to the meeting of January 19, 2005. Available in Beaconsfield’s digital archive.
13. “Aim 1: appendix”, Critical Practice, accessed February 5, 2016, http://www.criticalpracticechelsea.org/wiki/index.php?title=Aim_1:_appendix
14. This is one of the aspects that the curatorial team, especially Sally Tallant and Janna Graham, repeatedly find themselves defending against the funding structures of the art context. See also O’Neill and Doherty 2011, 230231.
15. The “non-instrumental” approach includes the objective to build trust and common ground with the local population. Central to this is the notion of the “curator-producer,” who should primarily demonstrate solidarity with the neighbourhood. See the account of this idea in O’Neill and Doherty 2011, 813.
16. The founding members are Afterall, Chisenhale Gallery, Electra, Gasworks, LUX, Matt’s Gallery, Mute Publishing, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire.
17. The central function of these aspects was emphasised by several speakers at the conference; for details, see the video documentation of the conference on the website of Common Practice: <http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/public-assets-small-scale-arts-organisations-production-value/>
18. In 2002 Michelle Reeves, Research Officer, composed a review of the studies conducted so far on the topic of “Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts,” commissioned by the Arts Council. The Arts Council’s intention was “to help improve the robustness of research methods and evidence demonstrating the contribution of arts and culture to the social and economic objectives of national and local government, and other key partners” (Reeves, *Ibid.* 1). In her paper “State Support of Artists: The Case of the United Kingdom in a Labour Party Environment and Beyond,” sociologist Victoria D. Alexander exemplarily points to the arguments

- employed by the Arts Council to legitimise its funding decisions, which usually directly refer to a political agenda. Alexander 2007, 11.
19. In his analysis, Clive Gray emphasises the paradox of neoliberal politics, which demands a simultaneously lean but strong state. Gray 2000, 10607.
 20. See also the confidential “Executive Note” by Philip James, dated March 23, 1950, in the archive of the ICA.
 21. See, for example, the list from the period of 1976 to 1977, which is available in the Arts Council England archives.
 22. Quoted from a statement by Alan Bowness on July 3, 1978, on the priorities of the Arts Council, a contribution to the discussion of the Arts Council’s Art Advisory Board, which discussed a possible shift in the distribution of funds in its meeting of July 12, 1978. See the minutes of the meeting in the Arts Council England archive.
 23. The basis of this approach to cultural politics is the first policy paper drawn up by Jennie Lee in 1965 at the behest of the government. In a lecture on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Camden Arts Centre, Nicolas Serota emphasised that the principles of cultural politics formulated in that paper are still valid today. The lecture held on September 22, 2015, can be accessed at <http://www.camdenartscentre.org/whats-on/view/50-talk1>
 24. Before his appointment as Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, Serota worked for the Arts Council as “Regional Art Officer” from 1970 to 1973.
 25. The foundation board only intervened on issues related to content in cases involving what they perceived to be sensitive political topics, such as the exhibition “Art for Society,” which took place at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1978.
 26. See the Evaluation Report on SUPERNOVA, in the Arts Catalyst archive.
 27. Andrea Philips, 2015, in the introductory speech to the conference “Public Assets.” Recording available at: <http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/public-assets-small-scale-arts-organisations-production-value>
 28. Brett et al. 2010–11, 616.
 29. *Ibid.*, 89.
 30. *Ibid.*, 1011.
 31. *Ibid.*, 1213.
 32. *Ibid.*, 1415.
 33. Maria Lind uses this term with reference to the Swedish academic Sven-Eric Liedman who in his paper “Pseudo-quantities, new public management and human judgement” (2013) differentiates between the output and value of quantitative measurements in contrast with what he calls “verbal evaluations,” Maria Lind in her input at the conference “Public Assets.” Recording available at: <http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/public-assets-small-scale-arts-organisations-production-value>

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Rachel Mader is an art researcher. Since 2012, she has directed the Competence Centre for Art, Design & Public Spheres, at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Art. Between 2009 and 2014 she led the project *Organising Contemporary Arts: Artistic Practice and Cultural Policy in Post-war Britain*. She is publishing on political art, ambivalence in the arts, institutional studies, participatory practices in the arts and artistic research.

From Social Inclusion to Audience Numbers: Art Museums in the New Public Management

Charlotte Bonham-Carter

Abstract In the administrative climate cultivated by the New Public Management (NPM), New Labour tasked museums in the UK with demonstrating hard evidence of social inclusion. However, the administration mostly failed to offer a clear explanation of the concept of social inclusion, and its relevance to art museums. This chapter argues that the ambiguity of the New Labour social inclusion agenda, coupled with the administration's demand for evidence, meant that audience numbers – one of the only data sets that could be gathered quickly and cheaply – became a proxy indicator of social inclusion. The chapter concludes that the political and administrative climate fostered by NPM is a useful framework for understanding how the collection of audience numbers became a key data set for museums in the late twentieth century.

Keywords New Public Management (NPM) · Audience numbers · Instrumental cultural policy · Museums and galleries · Social inclusion · New Labour

C. Bonham-Carter (✉)

Course Leader, University of Arts London, London, UK

e-mail: c.bonhamcarter@csm.arts.ac.uk

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_3

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last couple of decades, invigilators counting the number of visitors into a gallery or automated clickers at the entrance to an exhibition have become standard features of the museum experience. Despite vociferous disagreements in the cultural sector about the usefulness of audience numbers as a data set, and continuous debates about the methods we should use to “count” visitors (How do you count listeners to a radio programme? Do we value repeat visitors more, or less, than unique visitors? How do we mitigate against “creative counting?”), we cannot seem to get away from the idea that counting matters. But how did this phenomenon come to be such an accepted museum practice? And, do audience numbers really measure what they set out to?

This chapter explores the extent to which the political and administrative climate cultivated by the New Public Management (NPM) encouraged the use of audience numbers as a key success criterion for art museums in the UK. NPM is a theoretical framework used to describe a variety of changes that occurred in public sector administration in the 1980s and 1990s, in mainly English-speaking countries. One of the main tendencies identified in the theory is an increased emphasis on results, and evidence-based decision-making processes, in the public sector. This chapter considers the now standard museum practice of collecting data on “audience numbers” within a political and administrative context. It traces changes to the British welfare state and the “instrumental turn” in cultural policy, alongside the adoption of NPM techniques that occurred in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s.

The New Labour (1997–2010) government articulated the museum as an agent of social change and tasked such institutions with demonstrating social impact. However, the administration mostly failed to offer a clear explanation of the concept of social inclusion and its relevance to art museums. The central argument of this chapter is that the ambiguity of the New Labour social inclusion agenda, coupled with the administration’s demand for hard evidence, meant that audience numbers – one of the only data sets that could be gathered relatively quickly and cheaply – became a prominent proxy indicator of social inclusion.

In 2004, Eleonora Belfiore concluded that

One of the most compelling repercussions of instrumental cultural policies – especially against the background of the increasing reliance on evidence as the basis for public policymaking – is that issues of performance measurement and policy evaluation become of crucial importance. (Belfiore 2004, 196)

The intention of this chapter is to test Belfiore's proposition in more specific terms. It asks: Can we apply Belfiore's conclusion to a specific context (the art museum) and to a specific illustration of performance measurement (audience numbers)? In 2011, Katja Lindqvist conducted a literature review on the subject of public sector reform and cultural organisations. Her review found that most of the existing literature focuses on change in processes and policies, rather than impacts on the cultural organisations themselves (Lindqvist 2012). Therefore, this chapter aims to move beyond the exploration of the relationship between public sector reform and policy and instead to approach the question of the relationship between public sector reform and museum practice.

MUSEUMS AND AUDIENCES

The art museum is a very different proposition to other types of museums, and the contemporary art museum even more so. The art museum sits perhaps least comfortably alongside the social impact agenda that developed under New Labour because it is the least accessible form of institution. The art museum relies upon an a priori knowledge of its subject matter in order to make sense of its displays (Bennet 1995). Without this a priori knowledge, visitors can be alienated from inclusion into the museum's public. In some cases, as with smaller arts galleries, the intention is to provide a market alternative, and therefore to develop content that appeals to "serious" audiences, those educated in art or already working in the industry and which may conflict with that of the general public (Becker 1982). Although, of course, specialist and mass audiences are not always in direct opposition to one another, some smaller, contemporary and niche arts institutions struggle to engender broad public appeal, and many do not consider it their remit to do so (see Bourdieu 1993).

The relationship between museums and their audiences is a developing and changing one, situated in place and time. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, there was no assumption in the UK that museums should engage with the public. On the contrary, institutions of art were privately owned and were often either storehouses for the collections of royalty and the rich, demonstrations of the power of the monarch, or symbols of aristocratic status, and access was remarkably restricted (Bennett 1998). However, through a variety of reforms, by the middle of the nineteenth century, most museums were, in theory, open to all (Bennett 1998).

Museums in the UK became increasingly professionalised throughout the twentieth century. In this period, there was some consensus about the role of the museum. In simple terms provided by welfare economics, the rationale for museums rested on public goods and market failure; as the market failed to support certain kinds of cultural goods, the state would step in to make up the shortfall and provide for the public good (Pratt 2007).

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE BRITISH STATE

The state's role in correcting market failure made state management of the arts a different proposition to other forms of welfare settlement. Whereas the state generally redistributed resources from the rich to the poor and uneducated, in the arts, state support flowed to a wealthy, educated and elite demographic (Hewison 2014). As some scholars (Mulgan 1996; cited in Hewison 2014) have pointed out, there are many forms of culture that can be sustained by market support alone. As the role of the state has changed in the last 50 years, from a highly engaged welfare state to a minimally engaged neoliberal state (Pratt 2007), museums have had to make increasingly convincing arguments about their worth. Although neoliberalism is a highly contested term, according to David Harvey's widely acknowledged discussion of the term, the neoliberal state should favour strong individual private property rights, the rule of the law and institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade (Harvey 2007). As the British state transformed to a neoliberal state – with its emphasis on market determination – the cornerstone argument for subsidising the arts began to crumble, and there was increasing pressure on the arts sector to justify their special status as recipients of state support.

THE INSTRUMENTAL TURN

Against the backdrop of the developing neoliberal state and reduced funding for the arts, arguments about the economic value (and later, the social value) of culture became the dominant justification for spending on the arts (see *A Great British Success Story*, Arts Council England, 1985 and *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Great Britain*, Myerscough, 1988) in the 1980s. For many theorists (Belfiore 2004; Hewison 1995; O'Brien 2014, etc.), this shift represented the end of an era of cultural policy and administration dedicated to cultural excellence, and based upon aesthetic judgements, and the beginning of an era of cultural policy dominated by

arguments about the instrumental value of culture, or the possibility of culture attaining results in non-cultural areas. This shift became known as the instrumental turn. However, it is worth noting that the instrumental use of culture has always been at the core of UK cultural policy, beginning with the civilising aims of Victorian-era museums (Belfiore 2004). Importantly though, it was during the 1980s and 1990s that instrumental cultural policies became explicit, whereas previously they had always been largely implicit, marking a major change in cultural policy rhetoric (Belfiore 2004).

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND THE CULTURAL SECTOR

Throughout the 1980s, and alongside the diminishing welfare state and the movement in the UK towards a state of neoliberalism, a number of, mainly English-speaking, countries adopted a certain managerial modality. Although these changes varied significantly between different geographical contexts, they shared enough common ground to be theorised as the “New Public Management”. Broadly speaking, NPM emphasised

... cost control, financial transparency, the autonomisation of organisational sub-units, the decentralisation of management authority, the creation of market and quasi-market mechanisms separating purchasing and providing functions and their linkage via contracts, and the enhancement of accountability to customers for the quality of service via the creation of performance indicators. (Power 1997, 43)

The NPM arose as an alternative to the once-dominant models of accountability, which were based upon systems and processes rather than results (Hood 1995). The foundations of the NPM thesis lay in getting the private and public sectors to work together in a new way, and by shifting emphasis away from processes and towards a results-based output, which was capable of being quantified (Hood 1995). Very simply, the NPM concerned itself with moving away from hierarchical bureaucracy to the supposed efficiency of markets, and applying private sector mentalities to public sector administration (Power 1997).

The turn towards the NPM and its emphasis on public accountability and best practice led to the increased prominence of the audit in public administration or, what the accountability theorist Michael Power termed the “audit explosion” in the 1990s (Power 1994, 1997). By any number of indicators,

Britain became an “audit society” (Power 1994, 1997) throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The National Audit Office and the Audit Commission were established in the early 1990s; medical and teaching facilities became subject to new auditing bodies, such as the Higher Education Quality Council, now subsumed into the Quality Assurance Agency; accounting firms grew rapidly and health and safety, data and even scientific study audits have become commonplace (Power 1994). In many ways, the New Labour approach to culture was simply a migration of these attitudes towards public sector administration onto the cultural sector.

Although evidenced-based policy was not an entirely new phenomenon for the cultural sector in the UK, in the mid-1980s under the influence of the NPM, the impact of culture could no longer be talked about in general terms. In order to receive funding from the central government, cultural organisations had to produce hard evidence of impact. This development, alongside the adoption of an explicitly instrumental approach to culture, marked a new direction in cultural policy in the UK (Belfiore 2004).

CULTURAL POLICY UNDER NEW LABOUR

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the creative industries were cited as a means of regenerating communities. However, out of the idea that the arts could renew areas of rural and urban decay came ideas about the obvious social benefits of the arts. Under New Labour, the potential for the arts to have social impact, and contribute to social inclusion, became an important justification for public investment in culture. Social impact arguments were connected to a wider strategy under New Labour to tackle social exclusion, which was confronted by the Social Exclusion Unit, a newly formed interdepartmental initiative. According to the SEU, social exclusion was

... a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. (Social Exclusion Unit 2004)

Accordingly, social inclusion is defined as providing “appropriate opportunities for individuals labeled as ‘socially excluded’ to engage with social, cultural and economic institutions” (Durrer and Miles 2009).

Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Cabinet Office 1998), the third report written by the SEU, detailed to the Prime Minister “integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown, and bad schools etc.” (Cabinet Office 1998). The foundations for the report had been laid in previous government initiatives from the 1960s onwards, including the Urban Programme, the Urban Development Corporations and task Forces in the 1980s, the Single Regeneration Budget in the 1990s and the New Deal for Communities. *Bringing Britain Together* aimed to create policies that would benefit the poorest communities. The report established 18 teams to address the problem of social exclusion in a joined up manner. The teams were divided into five themes: getting the people to work, getting the place to work, building a future for young people, access to services and making the government work better (Cabinet Office 1998, 6). Policy Action Team 10 (PAT 10) concerned itself with art and sport, and was grouped into the “getting the place to work” theme. The theme was charged with creating orderly and sustainable communities, and fostering stronger communities by promoting self-help and maximising the contribution of arts and sport (Cabinet Office 1998, 56). The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) led PAT 10.

A number of reports detailing the relationship between the arts, museums and social inclusion followed (see *PAT 10: Report to the Social Exclusion Unit — Arts and Sport*, DCMS 1999; *Addressing Social Exclusion: A Framework for Action*, Arts Council England 1999; *Building on PAT 10: Progress Report on Social Inclusion*, DCMS 2001; *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: PAT Audit Cabinet Office*, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: PAT Audit Cabinet Office* 2001). Moreover, in 2000, DCMS published *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All*, a seminal policy document that addressed museums, social inclusion and social impact. The document supposedly offered guidance on social inclusion for DCMS-funded and local authority museums, galleries and archives in England.

However, the guidance offered to museums within this policy document, and others from the period, was often conflicted or vague. For starters, the concept of social impact and its relationship to social inclusion was poorly defined, and frequently, wildly ambitious. A report for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council found that cultural organisations were being asked to address a wide range of social policy agendas,

including social exclusion, neighbourhood renewal, community cohesion, cultural diversity, health and regeneration (cited in Hesmondhalgh et al. 2015). Policy documents during this period frequently conflated these multiple agendas. Different priorities were laid out in different documents, and it was often unclear to organisations in the sector what they were being asked to do. Access, which historically has been an important objective for museums, became a stand-in for social inclusion. And yet, a chapter commissioned by the Arts Council England in 1999 admitted that expanding access did not constitute social inclusion (Jermyn 2001), neither did working with socially excluded groups, without a social objective (Jermyn 2004).

There was little indication in the policy documents as to how social inclusion could be achieved as part of the core practice for museums and galleries, let alone art museums in particular. *PAT 10: A Report to the SEU* acknowledged a distinction between art that requires “participation” and art that is intended to be “consumed” by spectators. In addition, early policy documents regarding social inclusion, including *Bringing Britain Together* and *PAT 10: A Report to the SEU*, were explicit about the fact that they were primarily addressing art that requires participation. However, *Centres for Social Change*, published one year later in 2000, made little mention of how social inclusion could be balanced against other responsibilities – such as acquisitions, conservation, interpretation, scholarship and education – in practical terms, with limitations including budget and staffing resources.

It did not help that nearly all case studies within the policy reports (including the research commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE)) referred to community and participatory arts projects. The policy reports made little or no mention of traditional art museum responsibilities, such as programming, the creation of exhibitions and the maintenance of a collection (DCMS 2000). Although many museums claimed that social inclusion already was, or was quickly becoming, the core of their agenda, they also maintained that they would have to take money away from “more traditional” aspects of a museum in order to fund their social inclusion activities (GLLAM 2001). It was unclear from the policy directives whether the government expected museums to pursue social inclusion exclusively or whether they were to fulfil multiple functions, including “traditional” museum activities alongside participatory projects aimed at social inclusion. Moreover, if the latter, museums grappled with how they could take on new roles, whilst continuing existing responsibilities, without increased resources.

EVALUATION AND IMPACT MEASUREMENTS

Beyond the definition of what constituted social inclusion, there was little guidance in the policy documents as to how museums could evidence their contributions to social inclusion. In fact, one of the first reports under New Labour, *PAT 10: A Report to the SEU*, noted that there was “little hard evidence of the benefit of art to community development” (DCMS 1999, 37). Later, in 2004, a report from the Arts Council concluded that most of the outcomes from art participation are “soft outcomes” (increased self-confidence, pleasure and enjoyment, increased self-esteem, etc.) which may (or may not) lead to “hard outcomes” (such as employment) (Jermyn 2004, 9). The publication of a number of independently commissioned reviews on the arts and social inclusion in the early 2000s demonstrated an increasing anxiety from within the sector about the extent to which arts and cultural organisations could achieve, let alone demonstrate, social inclusion.

The guidance to museums offered in the key policy documents mentioned earlier was filtered through a range of policy influencers before it reached the institution, or the practitioner (see Fig. 3.1). Like a game of Chinese whispers, the precision of meaning around social value, social inclusion, social impact and social objectives was compromised as agendas moved through the policy hierarchy.

As a result, institutions and practitioners employed in interpreting policy into practice (i.e. museum directors and curators) were left with a hazy composite picture of what was being asked of them.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND AUDIENCE NUMBERS

Under New Labour, all government departments had to adhere to Public Service Agreements, which included a list of objectives called Delivery Service Objectives (DSOs). The DSOs for culture included increasing visitor numbers to national museums, diversifying audiences in terms of class and ethnicity, increasing the number of Internet connections in libraries and increasing the amount of educational work undertaken by arts organisations (Hesmondhalgh et al. 2015, 91). However, these DSOs did not always chime with the values and objectives of arts organisations. The Head of Education at a local arts organisation voices her concern at the legacy of data collection left by

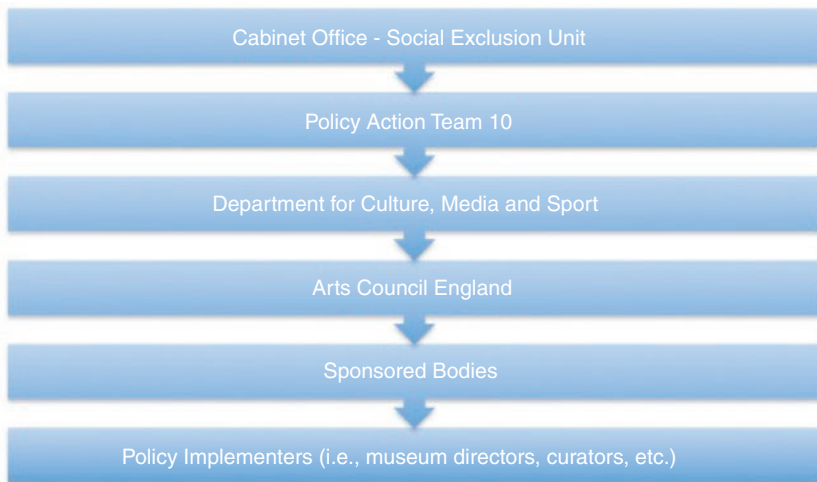


Fig. 3.1 The implementation of social inclusion policies into institutional practice, courtesy of the artist and created solely by the author, Charlotte Bonham-Carter

New Labour and expresses her frustration with the gap between performance indicators and her organisation's objectives:

But [this art gallery] is unapologetic in its approach, to say the art and the artist have got to come first. That's why we're an art gallery. That sounds like a very simple thing, an obvious thing, but for example, our funding from the city council is not dependent on our showing fantastic artwork, it's dependent on the number of people who come through the door, the number of people who engage on a workshop, the number of schools that we go and visit, the number of children who have x, y and z experience. (Cited in Tlili 2012, 171)

While increasing audience numbers was one of the DSOs for culture under New Labour, the importance of audience numbers as a key success criterion gained traction as much from the "bottom-up" as it did from the "top-down." As the cultural sector adopted the evidence-based model of the NPM, museums and galleries struggled to reconcile the ambiguous notions of social impact that had been set forth to them, with

the need to produce hard evidence. As their future funding depended on their ability to meet these new demands, many museums resorted to the one metric that they could gather quickly and cheaply: audience numbers. Although it said little about the profile of visitors to the museum, which was a major part of cultural policy at the time, audience numbers were a possible stand-in for data on outreach, access and even cultural diversity, and thus responded to the administration's vaguely defined notion of social impact.

In a survey of possible tests and measures of social inclusion, Graeme Evans identified the following:

Attendance/Participation
 Crime rates/fear of crime
 Health, referrals
 New community networks
 Improved leisure options
 Lessened social isolation
 Reduced truancy and
 Anti-social behaviour
 Volunteering
 Population growth.
 (Evans 2005, 13)

Clearly, none of these measures – except attendance/participation – could readily be applied to the gallery, or at least not without extensive and expensive monitoring procedures that were not viable for galleries with limited resources. However, in order to secure future funding, many museums latched onto audience numbers as a way to play the game. In 2001, the Group for Large Local Authority Museums (GLLAM) wrote a report largely advocating the role of the arts in combating social exclusion and inspiring hard (better health, less crime, increased employment and education) and soft outcomes (e.g. increased self-confidence and self-esteem). The report contained very little questioning of the social inclusion policy directive and its relationship to museums, declaring that museums agree “they are on the best possible road” (GLLAM 2001, 15). For many museums in the sector, the fear of losing future funding was enough to lead them to embrace the new priorities. However, this was, and remains, a dangerous strategy. Taken to the extreme, instrumental arguments about the role of culture and NPM techniques in the cultural sector could eventually negate the need for a cultural

strategy all together – if indeed it could be proven that social and economic initiatives fulfil these agendas with greater efficiency (Belfiore 2004).

CONCLUSION

After the neoliberal turn, market failure could no longer justify spending on the arts, and defining the value of culture in non-cultural turns (i.e. social or economic value) became the norm. The instrumental turn defines the transition from cultural policies based upon notions of excellence and towards cultural policies based upon instrumental value. Alongside the instrumental turn, and the changing nature of the British state, the cultural sector was impacted by the turn towards the NPM, a system of accountability that was based upon results and outputs, as opposed to hierarchy and protected processes. The combination of neoliberalism, NPM and the instrumental turn, coupled with poorly defined objectives in key cultural policy documents, encouraged the use of audience numbers as a success criterion, both from “the bottom-up” and from “the top-down.”

However, the question of whether the process of collecting data on audience numbers had any real impact on museum practice remains open. There is an important distinction between evidence-based policy and evidence-based management: the former is about the governance of public administration and the latter is how these attitudes play out at an organisational level (Tlili 2014). While there is a robust field of scholarship demonstrating how neoliberalism, NPM and the instrumental turn led to evidence-based policy in the cultural sector, there is comparatively less research exploring how this context led to evidence-based management in the cultural sector. This chapter suggests that the prominence of audience numbers as a key success criterion is a consequence of the movement from evidence-based policy towards evidence-based management in the cultural sector.

However, questions remain about the real import of these management techniques in the cultural sector. From the top-down approach, we should ask; did funders deploy real consequences for museums that did not meet their targets? And, from the “bottom-up” rationale, we should ask; did museums alter their practice, in order to attract larger audiences, and increase their audience numbers? According to the “social life of methods” theory, methods help to construct reality (O’Brien 2014 and Power 1994) and under New Labour, metrics that were intended to measure existing activity became targets that shaped future activity

(O'Brien 2014). While we can say that the political and administrative climate of the NPM encouraged the use of audience numbers as a data set, it is difficult to assess the extent to which organisations *internalised* the metric as a key success criterion, or to put it simply, whether it had any real meaning for them. Either way, the predominance of the metric in the cultural sector appears to be a legacy of New Labour. Moreover, whilst audience numbers are an important part of performance management and public accountability, it is important to be clear about what they measure and what they do not, and in which situations they are relevant and in which they are not – because if we get that wrong, we threaten the entire health and heterogeneity of the arts ecology.

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Charlotte Bonham-Carter is Course Leader of MA Arts and Cultural Enterprise at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. She has held many curatorial positions in London and maintains a professional practice as a researcher and arts management consultant.

PART II

Theory

Rethinking the Social Turn: The Social Function of Art as Functionless and Anti-Social

Ana Bilbao Yarto

Abstract The present chapter discusses the notion of “Political Art,” one of the main concepts that emerged from theoretical reflection on the so-called social turn in art during the 1990s. One of the problems identified as stemming from such reflection is that the concept places excessively narrow normative constraints on notions of artistic practice, often to the detriment of less explicitly utilitarian works. The intention is to bring to light the presuppositions and clarify the rhetorical indeterminacy underlying contemporary conceptions of “Political Art” by contrasting it to the concept of “Politics of Aesthetics” as theorised by Jacques Rancière.

Keywords Political Art · Politics of Aesthetics · The Social Turn · Hal Foster · Jacques Rancière

In 2012, the curators of the 7th Berlin Biennale described art as “a tool for social transformation [that operates] by presenting a range of attempts of influencing politics directly” (Biennale 2012). This curatorial premise

A. Bilbao Yarto (✉)
Afterall, Central Saint Martins, London, UK
e-mail: a.bilbao@afterall.org

© The Author(s) 2017
C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value
and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_4

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represents the so-called social turn from the 1990s, which art historian Claire Bishop associates with an ethical turn in art criticism (Bishop 2005). The ethical turn is, in short, that which takes social concerns as its canvas, as its artistic means and as its artistic medium. Bishop describes it as our contemporary avant-garde, in which artists use social situations “to produce dematerialised, anti-market, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life” (Bishop 2005, 183). Her understanding is primarily inspired by collaborative or participatory artistic practices. However, in this context, the concept will be taken as descriptive of a general attitude that has permeated contemporary art, its presentation, its dissemination and its institutionalisation in the West since the early 1990s towards inequalities, human rights, gender, race, sustainability, migration, war, among others. The analysis of the ethical turn will be carried out by analysing concepts that have been mainly discussed by scholars located in Europe and in the United States. However, due to the proliferation of the biennale culture and the so-called international art language since the 1980s, the concepts for discussion could also be useful tools to think about practices happening elsewhere—although carefully and sensibly—bearing in mind their own cultural context and without becoming mechanisms for imposition instead of expansive tools for thought.

Two of the main concepts that have been articulated since the reintroduction of art’s social value will be discussed: Political Art, theorised by Hal Foster, and Politics of Aesthetics, theorised by Jacques Rancière, and inspired by Theodor Adorno. The discussion aims at bringing to light the presuppositions underlying contemporary conceptions of Political Art. This will be achieved by contrasting it to Rancière’s idea of aesthetics *as* politics, which aims at reclaiming and recontextualising both the concept of politics and the concept of aesthetics.

The former concept, Political Art, is part of what has been described by Bishop and Rancière as the “ethical turn of aesthetics.” Building up from the previously mentioned description, this turn is represented by ameliorative practices that aim to subvert the problems of our current state of affairs (e.g. inequalities, social exclusion, the dismantling of the welfare state, etc.). The latter does not represent a way or a period of artistic production and is instead an explicit criticism to the dangers of Political Art. Politics of Aesthetics aims at reintroducing *aesthetics* as a relevant concept that treats art and its political potential not as a project with direct social goals, but as a project that is disruptive of our very understanding of art and its boundaries, and in consequence a different approach to

ourselves and to our world. “Artistic gestures that shuttle between sense and nonsense, that recalibrate our perception, that allow multiple interpretation...and that have a life beyond an immediate social goal” (Bishop 2006, 24). Thus, Politics of Aesthetics is not concerned with direct outcomes; it avoids instrumentalisation or fetishisation, and instead attempts to reconfigure our understanding of the world, allowing us to be part of the creation of a space, of a standpoint.

Political Art, the first concept, threatens the transformative potential of art by means of (1) reproducing values and actions from the world that we claim to be so dissatisfied with rather than providing meaningful experiences that strengthen art’s social potential, and (2) providing society with palliative measures that account only for an apparent social transformation in the name of art. It is intended that the second concept problematises the first one, and that it contributes towards conceptualising a framework in which art is charged with the opportunity to be that which unveils and provokes, that unique sphere that constantly destabilises—but most significantly—a sphere that denaturalises our existing relations to the world, allowing us to experiment with inhabiting it differently.

THE SOCIAL TURN FROM THE 1990s

The idea of the social dimension of art did not first emerge in the 1990s. Since Ancient Greece, Plato was already concerned with the implications that art had in its relationship to the State, let alone the regulatory social function that it had during the Paleolithic. The social dimension of art is a historical concern that has been killed, buried and later resurrected several times in the course of art history (e.g. avant-garde and neo-avant-garde). This does not mean that it re-emerges by using the same media, forms or practices in every case. Lars Bang Larsen claims that the 1990s saw shifts in several aspects of artistic practice in which new ways of producing, mediating, presenting and marketing art emerged (Bang Larsen 2012). For example, the popularisation of large-scale exhibitions, the professionalisation of the curator, the boom of small visual arts organisations (SVAOs) around the world, the turns to the discursive, the educational or the socio-political, are all indicative of these changes.

Bang Larsen describes how processes and situations gained importance over final products and object-based artworks: contemporary art had become interested in avant-garde’s ideal of merging art with everyday life, but this time as a critique to neoliberal ideology, and as a “refuge from late

capitalism” (Bang Larsen 2012, 92). For instance, *Relational Aesthetics*, as described by Nicolas Bourriaud, exemplify how artistic practice turned into social experiments and into an arena for inter-human relations (Bourriaud 2002). These experiments, combined with the attitude that contemporary artists took towards “the era of human rights,” permeated and still permeate distinct aspects of the art world. The aforementioned 7th Berlin Biennale equally serves as an illustration of this phenomenon, as curator Artur Zmijewski and his collaborators Voina and Joanna Warza explicitly claimed to be interested in enhancing the social impact that art and artists had, alongside their responsibility towards social change. In “For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art,” Hal Foster describes the shifts in our perception of the social dimension of art and how this art has displaced the representation of the class subject, as in Daumier’s painting *The Third Class Railway Carriage*, to an apparent critique of social representations (ethnic stereotyping, gender positioning, among others) (Foster 1985).

A more comprehensive and recent example of the social turn that includes several of the attitudes described earlier is the project *The Museum of Arte Útil* (translated as The Museum of Useful Art). Artist Tania Bruguera collaborated with the Queens Museum in New York and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven to develop a project based on the artist’s research on creating new tools to benefit society. The idea was to incorporate research, an online platform, a publication, public projects and interventions, an association of *Arte Útil* (Useful Art) practitioners, a lab presentation at Queens Museum and to transform the old building of the Van Abbemuseum into *The Museum of Arte Útil* (2013). For Bruguera and the museum’s curators, useful art must

1. Propose new uses for art within society
2. Challenge the field within which it operates (civic, legislative, pedagogical, scientific, economic, etc)
3. Be “timing specific,” responding to current urgencies
4. Be implemented and function in real situations
5. Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users
6. Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users
7. Pursue sustainability whilst adapting to changing conditions
8. Re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation. (Tania Bruguera 2013)

Even though the statement presents us with some strong and interesting ideas that certainly highlight and reclaim some aspects of art’s social

potential, the project aligns with Bruguera's broader conception of useful art being political in the sense that it must deal with consequences and solutions. This project was selected as an example of the social turn precisely because it is highly descriptive of the widespread understanding of "socially engaged" or, more accurately, "Political Art." In her Political Art Statement, Bruguera provides a vague definition of politics by arguing that "politics is the action of changing things in society" (Bruguera 2010). Rather than insightful, this conception appears to be accommodating as its scope for interpretation is left infinitely open. Such openness means that the content can be filled in a number of ways, which might even be diametrically opposed to each other. In consequence, contemporary conceptions of politics of this sort vacate the word of any significant meaning. This conception of politics translated into Political Art implies, as Bruguera articulates it, that art must go beyond the realm of art by means of being part of everyday life:

Art is something that must be considered disposable, a means for other things, a protection layer. I understand there are artists that are consistent and that I respect [those] who focus on the search of new associative combinations, but this experience in itself, without a purpose outside the world of art, does not excite me. Art, as happens with a scientific discovery, should be seen in its applications. (Bruguera 2010)

Her statement continues almost as a handbook of what counts as Political Art and what does not. She finishes it by claiming that political artists do not want to be interior decorators, and thus, in order to be between art and politics, the artist's position must be that of dissatisfaction. Bruguera's prescriptive and authoritative statements condemn us to an art of dissatisfaction, reducing its expression to direct actions that tend to be easy to digest, accessible, easy to consume. It is not my intention to celebrate art and artists that take the opposite path, in which art looks a little too much like art, in which the wall texts are only intelligible to a few and in which the neatness of the space of display provides some with the false illusion of belonging, of understanding, and of life being more bearable, more beautiful.

However valuable the link between art and politics could be, it mustn't remain unquestioned. Should we comply to the reduction of politics to dissatisfaction? Is it possible to imagine this link beyond calls for direct action? Is there a third avenue that will allow us to think about the social potential of art that goes beyond the dichotomy of absolute autonomy and

activism? The social turn in art criticism is not only descriptive of the attitude described previously, but it is also symptomatic of a rhetorical entanglement in relation to the word “political,” epitomised by Bruguera’s Political Art Statement. One of the problems that this social turn brought about is that it has motivated wild and prescriptive definitions of both politics and Political Art, such as Bruguera’s. *Political* became a buzzword in the visual arts sector, and it is widely used in artist statements, biennial press releases, journal articles, panel discussions or curatorial statements indiscriminately. This rhetorical indeterminacy enables impoverished versions of the artistic and the political by sterilising them and reducing them to spheres that cannot exceed the realm of ethics. The dangers of reproducing these discourses are that they permeate funding bodies and policy-making in the arts. This means that the instrumentalisation of artistic practice in the service of social ends has taken on an institutional form. In an interview with Dusan Barok in 2009, Claire Bishop describes how neoliberal governments privilege participatory art as a way to “provide homeopathic solutions to problems that are systematic” (Barok 2009) in order to fulfill their agendas in relation to “social inclusion.” Furthermore, this is not only convenient in terms of populism and apparent inclusion, but also as a means to justify that funds previously designated to practices deemed to be “useless,” such as the arts, are now being designated to “useful,” “efficient” and “productive” tasks. For example, from 1998 to 2003 the Arts Council England ran “The New Audiences Programme” with a budget of 20 million pounds. The aim was to “encourage as many people as possible to participate in and benefit from the arts in England” (Johnson 2004, 1). The priority areas in developing this programme were “general audiences, young people, diversity, disability, families, inclusion, rural and older people” (Johnson 2004, 1). This is also an example of how Foster describes the historical shifts in Political Art and how its latest interest is an apparent critique of social representations.

Contrary to the *musts* of Political Art that Bruguera prescribes, such as “unfashionable...legally uncomfortable, civically uncomfortable” (Bruguera 2010), these practices have proven to be a balsam for neoliberal governments. Taxpayers can be easily satisfied by the government funding primarily “Political Art” that is “useful” for society. The problem is not only the limitations that this could potentially bring to contemporary artistic production, but also that these popular notions of politics, art and Political Art might be grounded in premises that might end up threatening their own transformative potential.

Jacques Rancière starts his chapter on “The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics” by warning us about the rise of ethics as a fashionable word, which is often taken as synonym of “morals.” If understood in this way, the ethical turn would mean that “today there is an increasing tendency to submit politics and art to moral judgements about the validity of their principles and consequences of their practices” (Rancière 2009, 109). However, he considers that this is not necessarily what is happening with contemporary artistic production, yet Bishop’s interpretation of the ethical turn calls into question this aspect of Rancière’s conceptualisation. For the French philosopher, the real problem of the ethical turn is that the distinction between what is and what ought to be has become blurred. In other words, the ethical turn brought about the dissolution of the specificity of political and artistic practices: ethics amounts to the “identification of all forms of discourse and practice under the same indistinct point of view” (Rancière 2009, 110). This is precisely what motivates the creation of a category such as Political Art.

Nowadays, the ethical turn of aesthetics is descriptive of a kind of art that witnesses and archives contemporary life in the age of consensus, an art whose aims have become “to return the lost meaning of a common world or to repair the cracks in the social bond” (Rancière 2009, 122). Rancière associates the ethical turn in aesthetics to the idea of art being at the service of social change, yet for him this ethical turn is no less than a “point of honour given to the new forms of domination” (Rancière 2006, 18), in the sense that instead of reconfiguring a sphere of experience, it reproduces the ideal values of neoliberal ideology.

The intention now is to challenge Bruguera’s notion of politics, and then to describe two different concepts of being political in art, which are useful to bring some clarity in relation to the dangers of the social turn. Differently to Bruguera, Rancière argues that politics is not a power struggle between opposed views. On the contrary, politics is the “configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience” (Rancière 2009, 24). This means that politics is concerned with distributing and reorganising the ways in which we are located in time and space, our ways of seeing, thinking and being. Politics is concerned with making “visible what had not been” (Rancière 2009, 25). In this sense, art which is political cannot be where Bruguera wants it to be: art that is political cannot be assimilated into everyday life, into what was already visible, and the Political Artist is not the dissatisfied combative individual who points out the problems of the establishment. If the aim is to reconfigure and

redistribute our ways of being and thinking, her Political Art Statement is an invitation to do the opposite: to reproduce existing values and formats through an ideology of efficiency and usefulness. Furthermore, the risk with her statement is that the neoliberal notion of “politics” is what is taken for granted, and thus art that becomes indistinguishable from everyday life is anti-political in Rancière’s sense by means of reproducing the same experiences rather than configuring particular or unexpected ones.

In what follows, a distinction between two forms of art in relation to socio-political dimensions will be made: Political Art and Politics of Aesthetics. The hope is that this distinction will help us to organise the rhetorical chaos brought about by the social turn, as well as to place Bruguera’s practices and ideals in the realm of Political Art, which in my view, threatens the social potential of art to recalibrate our experience of the world.

POLITICAL ART

Political Art is that which came about with the ethical turn of aesthetics in the 1990s. It constitutes itself by the “messages and feelings that it conveys on the state of social and political issues,” by the way in which it “represents social structures, conflicts, and identities” (16 Beaver 2006). In “For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art,” Hal Foster periodises the historical changes of this so-called Political Art, explaining how contemporary political struggle has shifted from a theoretical focus on class and economic identity as the main constituent aspects of subjectivity to a focus on social differences (Foster 1985). He describes how the Political Artist has been traditionally understood as anti-establishment in a surprisingly similar fashion to what we encounter in Bruguera’s way of being “political.” Foster claims that Political Art “did much theoretically both to discredit banal ideas of art as representational or abstract and to prompt a new model of meaning as actively produced, not passively” (Foster 1985, 142). Throughout the text, Foster warns us about the dangers of this kind of productivist conception of art, which he claims tends to instrumentalise cultural value (Foster 1985).

He also claims that the same way the avant-garde opposed the academy, this Political Art is understood as opposing our official modern culture (Foster 1985). The problem for him is that Political Art sometimes becomes indistinguishable from the axiological way of being political, which means that its significance relies on judgements of value. “Politics is thus reduced to ethics,” he says (Foster 1985, 155). This means that art comes to be

perceived as iconoclasm, idolatry and as the pure reproduction of the ruling ideology. Foster distinguishes between different kinds of Political Art with varying degrees of condemnation. He describes “presentational Political Art” as a kind of art that expresses the concerns of particular social groups (e.g. minorities), whose practices are characterised as iconic ideals. It is a kind of art that represents oppositional interests and that is rarely self-reflective. Moreover, this form of representation is fetishised and reduced to simple gestures, conventions and clichés. For Foster, the problem is that this art becomes submissive, and he takes social realism as an example (Foster 1985). Furthermore, this art sets an opposition between two different interests in the same way that Bruguera envisages her way of making Political Art. Even though Bishop referred to Political Art as the avant-garde of our time, Foster’s descriptions open up the question of whether Bruguera’s practice is to neoliberal ideology what social realism was to the Farm Security Administration in the United States in the 1930s, or what socialist realism was to the Soviet Union.

Another widespread view is that the reincorporation of art into everyday life provides an opportunity to generate alternative forms of social engagement. The aim is to encourage the alleged “passive consumer” to resist the evils of late capitalism, and instead to actively take part in “creative” means for social inclusion and participation. These practices are usually called political, socially engaged, participatory or committed. This has also taken an institutional form. For example, between 2000 and 2003 “The New Audiences Programme” in England became interested in regional challenges, and hence their engagement with community-based and emergent organisations. The final report of the programme describes how these organisations became more engaged with audiences, and how they changed their ways of working to become more inclusive. The report states that organisations also “shared models of *good* practice and ideas with other organisations” (Johnson 2004, 14). Some of these organisations were artist-run spaces or SVAOs.

THE NGOISATION OF ART AS AN EXAMPLE OF POLITICAL ART

The initiative discussed earlier coincides with the global boom of SVAOs from the 1990s. They are non-profit and structurally small art organisations that deliver contemporary artistic practice via a flexible horizontal field of activities and curatorial hybrids. They are characterised by an

interest in processes over end products, in research and knowledge production, and in a close engagement with their audiences and local contexts. Both private and public bodies fund them. These institutions emerged for different reasons and in various local conditions worldwide. Some of them emerged as platforms for experimental art or as spaces for exploring art and its social and political implications. In some cases, artist-run initiatives and collectives became more “institutionalised” in order to be able to apply for funding bodies, so they became alternative institutions or research centres. Other spaces emerged as responses to mainstream institutions, and some of them emerged precisely because of the lack of strong art institutions in their countries, as, for example, *ruangrupa* in Jakarta. The unlikelihood of these being local phenomena and the diverse conditions in which these spaces emerged only complicates their study.

These organisations often see themselves and are seen by contemporary scholarship as critical instruments in the service of social change. Hou Hanrou discussed this phenomenon in his text “Time for Alternatives,” where he describes forms of self-organisation and NGOs as examples of oppositional and “actively participatory force against the domination of state and global economic superpowers” (Hanru 2003, 115). He says that the importance of these spaces is that they reveal the need for creating alternatives to established cultural institutions. This is also an example of what Foster described as what Political Art traditionally opposes. Hanrou seems to presuppose that art and cultural institutions are spaces for socio-political transformation that could be inspired by NGOs.

For example, *Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory* – founded in 1990 in Utrecht has a critical programme that “explores art in the public realm, questioning the relation between art and its physical, social and political environment” (*Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory*, n.d.). They have a wide variety of undertakings that sometimes take place in the public sphere, but some others take the shape of an art exhibition, a workshop, a symposium, a publication, a discussion or an event. One of their leading projects was “The Grand Domestic Revolution GOES ON!” It is an ongoing project that started in *Casco* in 2009. The aims are to investigate the domestic space and its “changing use through a variety of methods and disciplines, traversing the fields of art, design, architecture, urban planning, activism and theory” (*CascoOffice for Art, Design and Theory* 2011).

The project took different shapes, such as exhibitions, talks, a catalogue, events, performances, discussions, actions, a library, town hall meetings, collaborations with domestic workers and immigrants, feminist activism,

reading groups and the installation of public kitchens and of cooperative childcare facilities, among others. For example, Nick Aikens said that the exhibitions reflected Utrecht's efforts to engage with the local community as well as their political concerns that involve equality and worker's rights (Aikens 2012). The ambitious project also travelled in the form of exhibitions to other alternative institutions that belong to COHAB (a network), such as The Showroom in London and Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm. The GDR GOES ON! Also travelled to the Centre for Contemporary Art Derry-Londonderry, where the project was focused on the "contemporary working conditions of caregivers – primarily mothers and grandmothers – in the domestic sphere" (*The Grand Domestic Revolution Goes On* 2013). Artist Andrea Francke installed a free childcare area where the parents and caregivers used the services, and in exchange told the artist about their personal and domestic life and work. By means of promoting ameliorative practices with moral and didactic purposes and by instrumentalising artistic activity, these institutions, which have indeed potential, transform their artistic values into exchangeable values. By doing this, their practice becomes indiscernible from other contemporary socio-political practices, which threatens art's unique position as a medium for criticism.

POLITICS OF AESTHETICS

For Rancière, Politics of Aesthetics does not represent an improvement over the Political Art brought about by the ethical turn of aesthetics. Instead, he suggests a fairly disappointing third option that he calls "encounters" or "invitations." He says that this art no longer creates objects but situations, and no longer responds to the criticism of commodities but to the lack of social bonds (Rancière 2009). He directly refers to *Relational Aesthetics*, which has no less ameliorative aims than what he condemns under the ethical turn of aesthetics. In fact, he later admits that "relational art" is a softer version of the ethical turn. However, Rancière says that this third option identifies with both forms of life (as in Political Art) and with political possibilities (as in Politics of Aesthetics). In spite of this unfortunate third option, which presumably is to have the potential to "reshape" the political, it is only his second option, Politics of Aesthetics, which provides us with this opportunity. Politics of Aesthetics will be presented as a concept that is in direct opposition to Political Art. It is not my intention to provide an example of good practice or an alternative, but only to shed light on the risks and problems inherent in Political Art.

Rancière argues that art does not have to be assimilated as a form of life (Rancière 2009). On the contrary, he says, “the work’s political potential is associated with its radical separation from the forms of aestheticised commodities and of the administered world” (Rancière 2009, 40). This means that truly subversive art consists precisely in its indifference to specific political projects and its refusal to decorate everyday life (Rancière 2009). If Bruguera claims that political artists do not want to be interior decorators, Rancière teaches us that with a conception of the political such as hers, the Political Artist incarnates what she refuses to be. If politics is the configuration of a specific sphere of experience, then a Politics of Aesthetics neither affirms the essence of the world nor takes a conciliatory attitude towards it. Politics of Aesthetics incarnates contradiction as it bears the gap between art and everyday life, and it is precisely in this gap where a distinct sphere of experience could be configured.

Likewise, the problem extends to cases in which Political Art acquires an institutional form. The NGOisation of art, contrary to paving the way to recalibrate our experiences, leads art to take on an agenda that belongs to the interests of other spheres. It blurs the lines between the political and the artistic by means of submitting them to the same ethical judgement. Art’s social contribution is equated to an ethical contribution and it risks being judged accordingly by the institutional theory of art. If the institutional theory of art, part and parcel of the production and presentation of visual arts, incorporates this judgement, it explicitly threatens the funding, the making and the dissemination of experimental art formats that do not ethically contribute to society. Furthermore, when politics become official policies (Emmelhainz 2013), it ceases to be politics in Rancière’s sense, leaving us with works that lack both a political as well as an artistic value.

This does not mean that art should not have a social function, but as Theodor Adorno says that the social function of art resides neither in how it is produced nor in the impact of its social topics. Art, “by crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful’... criticises society by merely existing...” (Adorno 1997, 226). This means that from a Rancierian/Adornian perspective, Bruguera’s idea of critique appears impotent. Art is social to the extent that it turns its back to society by occupying a unique position and by resisting the sphere of immediate use-values. Thus, Politics of Aesthetics in this sense resists instrumentalisation or fetishisation, and instead reconfigures a particular sphere of experience. In other words, even though

the NGOisation of art presents itself as committed and critical, truly committed art, as Adorno says, is not “intended to generate ameliorative measures, legislative acts or practical institutions” (Adorno 1978, 6). Moreover, it does not have an affirmative or conciliatory essence. On the contrary, he argues that it is precisely the distance that art can take from everyday life that allows it to acquire a critical function. In other words, its potential consists in resisting “by its form alone the course of the world” (Adorno 1978, 7). Moreover, art should be aware of its own gestures and produce symbolic meanings, instead of obsessing with processes. Bishop favours works that produce “conflict and unease” and that work “beyond the satisfaction of their immediate participants” (Barok 2009). This means that if art is to be social, in Adorno’s sense, it requires effort and imagination from the viewer in order to acknowledge its inherent contradictions and uncertainties. Therefore, incomprehensibility, excess, anti-didacticism, tension and alienation are some of the values that oppose the social turn in art from the 1990s. However, it would be questionable to replace a social turn in art criticism with a conflictual turn in art criticism. It would be equally arbitrary to praise artistic experiences merely on the grounds of their ability to produce ‘conflict and unease’, or to judge the social dimension of art counterintuitively, by demanding artistic practices that dissatisfy participants merely as counterweight to uninteresting participatory art. Furthermore, however disgusting it is to reduce audience engagement to ticking boxes, unproductive alienation and meaningless shock-value dissolve every opportunity to reactivate the tension between art and life, between ourselves and the world. In other words, art shouldn’t push us relate to the world neither too comfortably that we find ourselves blindly jumping into the clouds of false illusion, nor too uncomfortably pushing us off the cliff of futile disengagement.

TOWARDS A RECONCEPTUALISATION OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ART

We saw in this chapter the tension between two concepts: firstly, Hal Foster’s presentation of Political Art, in which art sacrifices itself in the name of social change, and the other, Rancière and Adorno’s criticism of Political Art, in which the potential of art consists in remaining autonomous by alienating itself from the spheres of immediate use-values. This allows it to reconfigure a sphere of experience by confronting the spectator with something which is itself not a product of the contemporary dominant ideology.

The social turn and its product, Political Art, threaten the transformative potential of art, which is associated with its unique role in the social context. The threat manifests by means of placing excessively narrow normative constraints on notions of artistic practice both at a conceptual and at a practical level. The risk of the former is that such prescriptive and fixed conceptions of Political Art could potentially prevent the conceptualisation of politics as a space that recalibrates our experience of the world. This leaves us with a limited space to develop an understanding of the transfiguration of our ways of seeing and being, even at the level of the possible. The risk of blurring the lines between the political and the artistic by submitting them to the same ethical judgement also has practical implications. Political Art is increasingly gaining terrain and its judgement is often translated into a model of “good” practice both at an institutional as well as at a social level. In the near future this could certainly be to the detriment of less explicitly utilitarian works of art. For instance, what would happen to artists that are less concerned with making direct social contributions of this sort? What would be the destiny of funding applications for projects that are more experimental with artistic mediums and concepts? In this sense the sphere of art must reclaim its social role, but as that which allows its publics to engage in meaningful experiences that are valuable in their own right, rather than being valuable in virtue of fulfilling moral standards.

Art is among the very few spheres left that have an actual opportunity to remain free from the values of judgement and codes of behaviour that are dominant in our current state of affairs. This means that art can still provide spectators with experiences that resist the pressures of conflict-solving, enjoying, understanding, learning and producing what is useful and efficient. Therefore, rather than becoming a totalising enterprise – conceptually and practically – art must exploit its politics of aesthetics and show us in practice how to restore our faith in its social potential. This means that art could offer its publics a new place from where to see by means of unveiling, provoking and destabilising what is considered as given. This could be achieved by also fostering – socially and institutionally – the appreciation of works that embody productive rather than unproductive tensions, which might incorporate a certain degree of contradiction, unease, visual intensity or discomfort, and not necessarily or strictly the appreciation of works that offer immediate satisfaction, efficiency, political correctness or charity.

The hope is to encourage dialogue related to the creation of artistic encounters that, instead of reproducing exchangeable values that are

inherent in empirical reality, help us to rethink artistic practices as vehicles for framing singular experiences. Hence, the idea is to resist both the institutionalisation of the “useful” and art that – as Bruguera argues – can “be implemented and function in real situations.” Since, as Adorno thinks, “insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness” (Adorno 1997, 227).

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Ana Bilbao Yarto Ana is Editor of *Afterall* Journal and a Research Fellow at the Afterall Research Centre in Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. Her research explores the emergence and development of Small Visual Arts Organisations (SVAOs) from the 1990s to present in various parts of the world. She completed her PhD in Art History and Theory with specialisation in Curatorial Theory and Practice in 2017 at the University of Essex, where she now teaches in Art History and Curating. Ana has worked in various areas of the cultural sector including art fairs, arts education, and curating.

The Paradoxical Engagement of Contemporary Art with Activism and Protest

Tijen Tunalı

Abstract As the contemporary art scene expands outwards with the financial intervention of the corporate sector, the underground cultural activities, experimental communities, and anti-establishment art spaces resist the systematization of the corporate logic. With what has been described as a “social turn of art,” we witness a shift in art’s engagement with politics, from igniting critical awakening in society to creating communal and egalitarian relations in the public spaces. Hence, the social, political, as well as aesthetic viability of these practices are often questioned. The tension between political activism and artistic representation still persists in the century-old paradox: aestheticization of politics that leads to spectacularization of art to make political ideologies attractive, and politicization of aesthetics that strips art of its autonomy, thus its power to operate as a creative process. Both views place art and politics in two different spheres that intersect and interact in desirable but dysfunctional ways. This article discusses that art is not trapped in the paradox between the aestheticization of politics and politicization of aesthetics; it finds its radical meaning and function in this position.

Keywords Art and activism · Protest art · Art and democracy · Aesthetics and politics

T. Tunalı (✉)

Art History, University of New Mexico, New Mexico, USA

e-mail: tijen2005@yahoo.com

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_5

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INTRODUCTION

The institutional art world usually recognizes two different cases of socially engaged art: one that builds on a social activity by prompting people to engage in it, hence—for some—compromising its aesthetic value, for example, “community-based art,” “relational aesthetics,” and “art of processes.” The other is art that assumes a political stance and/or an institutional critique and occupies the museum or gallery space for the enjoyment and contemplation of the art audiences. The former is usually a product of the off-space artist collectives and interdisciplinary collaborative groups that aim to form and organize political communities together with art communities. While the former operates shuttling in and out of the institutional art spaces, the latter plays the role of a Trojan horse in the art world and enjoys the experimental space of the art biennales, galleries and museums. There is another type of engaged art that is overlooked, which has a an ambiguous, dubious, and unstable relationship with the art world: the art that we encounter on the streets during protests, revolts, and uprisings. These types of art, mostly lumped together as “protest art.” They are produced for and/or on the streets but are sometimes carried into the spaces of the institutional art world to be viewed and experienced by the politically- oriented viewers.

The art world professionals have argued that the communicative and collaborative character of socially engaged art is also a handicap that compromises art’s aesthetic power. On the other hand, activists have insisted that the art world, having close ties with neoliberal capitalism, uses activist art as a “safety valve” in their exhibition systems as a way to satisfy the radical gaze of their audiences.

In this chapter, I analyze the artworks that are produced for revolts and uprisings with an attempt to discuss if art could provide an avenue for radical and anti-capitalist practices to grow. Concomitantly, on the question of the social value of art, I conclude that the focus should shift from calculating the immediate effects of socially engaged art in the social fabric toward recognizing the ways in which art’s aesthetic mode becomes the political arena as this arena is also the locus of rebirth for the new activism and the new art of disobedience.

Protest Art and the Art World

Protest art encompasses art in the form of banners, graffiti, murals, photographs, and posters used before, during, and after protests. It conveys

direct messages and works quickly in a manner that most people do not associate with art but with advertisements. Poster art is the most criticized form of protest art for hindering aesthetic quality for the sake of a political message. The artistic value of art engaged in social critique is often ignored until the work of art takes up an exchange value, distanced from its political act. Richard Serra's lithography poster of a thick, paint stick silhouette of a hooded Abu Ghraib prisoner (2004), and Turkish artist Burak Delier's poster of "Untitled (Girl with an EU Flag)" (2004) are intriguing examples for this discussion (Fig. 5.1).



Fig. 5.1 Burak Delier's poster as displayed in Istanbul Biennial 2005. Courtesy of the artist, © Burak Delier

Serra's poster depicting an Abu Ghraib prisoner with the text "STOP BUSH" is produced to be carried in street demonstrations against the U.S. policies in Iraq and is widely distributed freely over the World Wide Web. The image shows a black figure wearing a Ku-Klux-Klan hat, with his hands open as if to say, "I am not resisting." What is haunting about the image is the reversal of the roles of the victim and the oppressor: the image of a tortured Abu Ghraib prisoner is transformed into that of a violent xenophobic. This unexpected visual confusion disturbs the established mechanism of the image of the oppressor and of the oppressed. After this simple but haunting drawing became popular on the Internet, in an excellent commercial maneuver, the art world made Serra's work widely known through a poster advertising the Whitney Biennial in 2008. Richard Serra's lithography was included in the biennial, but of course, with a slight alteration: the text said "STOP B S." This alteration sterilized the work from its unexpected and confusing language and transformed it into an advertisement poster with an apparent message. Consequently, 250 copies were sold on the Internet for \$2,500 each, assuming an exchange value finalizing its commoditization. Serra's work is one of many examples of artworks that are made for the streets but get caught up in biennials' fetishism of controversial political art.

A similar example is Burak Delier's poster of a Turkish woman wearing the European Union's (EU's) flag as an Islamic veil. Delier cut a hole in the EU flag, put his girlfriend's face through the hole, and took a picture of it. He then made it a poster and glued it on the walls of Istanbul's most busy streets. The girl's eyes looked meaningful, but the meaning was unclear. It could represent awe, shock, amusement, or fear. Although shocking at first glance, the image contained many layers of meanings that initially are undetermined. In every local context that the image was received, its meaning has changed. For example, for the secularist Kemalists in Turkey, becoming integrated into the European Union could result in more enforced changes in the legal system, which could be a positive development for Islamists. For an Islamist, on the other hand, the ambiguous look of the eyes of the woman in the image might mean that, once in the European Union, Turkey's options for becoming an Islamic state would be finally over.

The mixed reactions of the divided public in Turkey (seculars and Islamists) were so extensive that major newspapers made Delier's image headline news. It was immediately seized upon the Internet fans and soon

it made its way even to the front page of the *Herald Tribune* and the *Financial Times*. As a result, Delier's work quickly became one of the most iconic images of 2005 in Europe and Turkey. The artist claimed about the political language of the image: "I am not politicizing the commercial language; it is already politicised. I only aim to open holes in this language that suffocates us." Delier was not aestheticizing the commercial language, as it was already aestheticized, he was disturbing this language by playing with its signs. After its controversial reception, the art world community, which previously had shown no interest in this image neither in Delier's other works when Delier applied to participate in previous Istanbul Biennials, hastily included this image in a sideshow at the 2005 Istanbul Biennial. Just as in the case of Serra, this image was welcomed by the Biennial organizers with an alteration: the poster was exhibited with a larger-than-life-size photographic print. Delier disseminated 1,000 copies of the image as a poster to the visitors of the Istanbul Biennial to be true to the intended purpose of its making.

Serra and Delier's images traveled from the street to the pages of newspapers, to the computer screen, to the art biennial. In this journey, they demonstrated to us that in a world of image creation, when everybody is both the creator and the consumer of images, and media and art are used as a machine for deceiving the audience, it is inconceivable to create a truthful image that carries a truthful political message (Groys, 2016). As Boris Groys aptly pointed, throughout the history of modernity, the main occupation of art has been the production of sincerity, honesty, and trust and the modern artist saw himself/herself as the honest person in a corrupted world (ibid.). Not only contemporary art but also our contemporary world is full of redesigned images, which Groys calls "design aestheticization" that entails aestheticization for the purposes of making the reality or political ideology more attractive and easier for the status quo to use. The art world industry not only creates the conditions for production, display, mediation, circulation, reception, and evaluation of the art, it constructs an aesthetic attitude by forming likes, dislikes, desire, and thus, the aesthetic sensibility of the society. With its codes, rituals, systems of identification, categorization, presentation, and methods to create art historical knowledge, the art world is one of the cultural mechanisms that distributes the sensible and constructs the "aesthetic regime"—as French Philosopher Jacques Rancière conceptualized it.

Rancière argued that when a work of art is bound to a certain "aesthetic regime" (the already established imposed message, the target audience,

the roles given to the audience) and when the “distribution of the sensible” (the way in which art is made visible and audible) is in the hands of the status quo and unequal, how can it be emancipating? For Rancière, art does not engage in politics as it wishes or when it wishes but *is* politics. Rancière notes: “Aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity. That is why those who want to isolate it from politics are somewhat beside the point. It is also why those who want it to fulfill its political promise are condemned to a certain melancholy” (Rancière, 2009, p. 148–149). This melancholy is exacerbated with art’s inherent paradox: art’s distance from life that allows its autonomy and establishes its aesthetic regime. Which means that the two conditions that make art “art” are the same conditions that make art ineffective in the arena of activism. Since the cultural revolutions of the 1960s, the activist artists have tried to merge art and life to bring art closer to politics. Rancière brings a different perspective to the relationship between art and politics by arguing that art is always political as it belongs to an aesthetic regime and art is politics when it creates disturbances in this aesthetic regime.

Rancière discusses that “police” is the organization of powers rooted in the consent of collectivities (agreement), and the system of legitimization and distribution of this power is what he defines as “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière, 2004). On the other hand, “politics” is the dimension of dissensus—a division within the consensual agreement (the mechanism of “policing”). “Policing” is the ordering and distributing what is visible or heard and what is to be excluded from this distribution. Rancière’s discussions on aesthetics and politics dwell on the dialectical relationship between the organization of homogenous act of “police” that creates the consensus, and heterogeneous acts of “politics” that correspond to the disagreement, divergence, disturbance, and division in the consensus. Rancière’s analysis is focused on the distinction between “police” and “politics,” between patrician and exclusion, on one hand, and the struggle of the oppressed for the spatial and temporal reconfiguration and representation, on the other. Dissensual subjectivization is the interruption in the distribution of social spaces and challenges the reduction of politics to the police. In Rancière’s account, in its post-autonomous form, art could act in the sphere of politics by disturbing the “distribution of the sensible.”

In the examples of Serra and Delier, the effectiveness of their communicative quality of the two images lied in their form that offers the simplicity of consumption and their confusing and shocking visual codes aimed to challenge the monopoly of reality. Rancière argues that:

“Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the read-ability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely by the uncanny, by what resists signification” (ibid., p. 59). In the hands of the institutional art world, Serra’s lithography was stripped from its aesthetic context of a lithographic print to be used in the protests and commercialized as an advertisement poster, Delier’s poster was stripped from its political act as a street poster and was redesigned by the modification of its medium and size. The art world is one of the most powerful communities that polices the distribution of the sensible and eliminates art’s potential power to disturb its own mechanism, which is what contemporary political art aims. Thus, one should look at outside the art world to the spaces of community art or where art merges directly with activism to investigate in which ways art becomes politics.

Visual Strategies During Teacher’s Uprising in Oaxaca

In May 2006, the annual teachers’ strike took an unexpected turn when the state’s Governor Ruiz refused to increase the education budget and raise teachers’ salaries. The teachers responded to this hasty refusal by a sit-in protest that is known as *plantones*, in front of public buildings, in the center of town Zócalo. In the early morning of July 14, the teachers and their supporters were confronted by police in riot uniforms, bullets, tear gas, helicopters, and death squads. The neighborhood people retaliated by bringing to the *planton* a collective support in the form of food and first aid. The police were ordered to extricate the strikers by force. The same day 300 different groups—from students to indigenous communities that came together to form the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO, in Spanish)—took over the *Radio Universidad* and began calling for the immediate resignation of Ruiz. When Ruiz answered this demand with thousands of fully armed police, what had begun as a sit-in of civil servants became a full-fledged conflict between the people of Oaxaca and the state authorities (Stephen, 2013, p. 12).

In spite of repeated police brutalities, violent conflicts, and random arrests as well as the disappearance of several people whose whereabouts remain unknown, the APPO firmly took control of the Zócalo and about 50 blocks around it. In the early days of the uprising, the APPO called upon all Oaxaqueños to participate in the conflict according to their skills and *savoir-faire*. This led to the creation of several

artist collectives, ASARO, *Asamblea Revolucionaria de Los Artistas de Oaxaca* (Revolutionary Assembly of Oaxacan Artists), being the largest with 35 artist participants. *Coatlicue*, *Revolver*, *Arte de Pistola*, and *Arte Jaguar* were the other artist groups that collaborated with the ASARO behind the barricades. During a 6-month occupation of government buildings around the center of the town of Zócalo, the self-organized public APPO unleashed the powerful reunion of the collective resistance forces and creativity against the power of their oppressors within the city, state, and global economy.

There was an immediate representation of the movement with vandalism and an unconstitutional attack on the democratically elected governor. Those included the images of burning street barricades, masked people, gas bombs, firecrackers, burning cars, and raised fists, shown in print media accompanying relevant articles in newspapers. The street battle between repressive and resistant forces soon became “the battle of images,” as I would call it when the artists formed collectives and occupied the walls of the city with their visual works. The two-dimensional images of rebellion on the walls confronted the three-dimensional images of the brutality of vehicles transporting the police, assassins, and paramilitary groups as well as the army in bulletproof vests and with AR-15 rifles ready to move in any attempt to break the authority of power and violence. While the clashes with the police continued, the art assemblies were created spontaneously by the young painters and graphic artists who wanted to put their talent to work in the service of the cause espoused by the APPO. During my interview with them, the artists of ASARO stated that:

We have retaken the form of the assembly because we believe in the possibility to recover the power of the collective in art and because the assembly is the form in which the pueblos have a dialogue and hold decisions based on collective interests. In this way, we respond as well to the call of the APPO to create an ample front of civil resistance.

Given the danger on the streets (the police were still cordoning off the center of town at the time), the strategy of functioning as an art collective had the advantage of offering anonymity, greater tactical movements, and speedy coverage when pasting posters or painting stencils on the city's walls. Today, these works testify not only to the specific events that shook Oaxaca in the summer of 2006, they also testify to an

understanding of the larger history of the resistance movements of the Mexican indigenous peoples, for 500 years. After the uprising, for the memory of the resistance, art collectives continued to produce posters that now hang on the walls of cafes, art centers, and cooperatives in Oaxaca.

One of the posters that captured the true image of the protests and became a historical document for the Oaxaca people is the poster titled “Oaxaca 2006: Women’s Resistance” (Fig. 5.2). This caption, written in both English and Spanish, immediately connects the uprising of underpaid government workers to the women’s resistance in Mexico and beyond. Under the text is another caption, which says “Celebrate People’s History” and a large paragraph (again in both English and Spanish) that explains what happened during the fall of 2006. The poster contains the stencil images of four women of different ages in local costumes, marching with pots and pans in their hands. Other women, depicted by the lithographic print, hold a giant mirror. Across their reflection in the mirror is written, “We are rapists,” as a twisted response to police’s use of sexual violence and rape as a repressive tactic.

This image literally represents hundreds of women behind the barricades who shouted, “We are rapists during the uprising.” The mirror reflects a black-and-white photograph of fully armed federal police in their protective gear. The women exchange their image with the police on the mirror. Their reflection becomes the heavily armed representation of their oppressor. Here, rape implies not only its literal meaning but also signifies all that has been taken by the state from the people of Oaxaca. This distinct and direct confrontation defies the logic of the oppressor while using the oppressor’s own language. A fascist representation that represses the possibility of resistance becomes the representation of resistance. The occupation of government buildings in Oaxaca, for 6 months, was not a message to the governor; it was a claim for what belongs to the common people and a declaration of the real political existence of the commoners. The way in which the people of Oaxaca, the teachers, workers, housewives, students, artists, street sellers, and the homeless defined representation in their own way showed what it means to make oneself visible to power. This creative representation of self (the political) and other (the police) in Oaxaca is an example of resistance aesthetics that is capable of a rupture in the “consensus,” where there is one reality that is framed by the political and cultural powers.

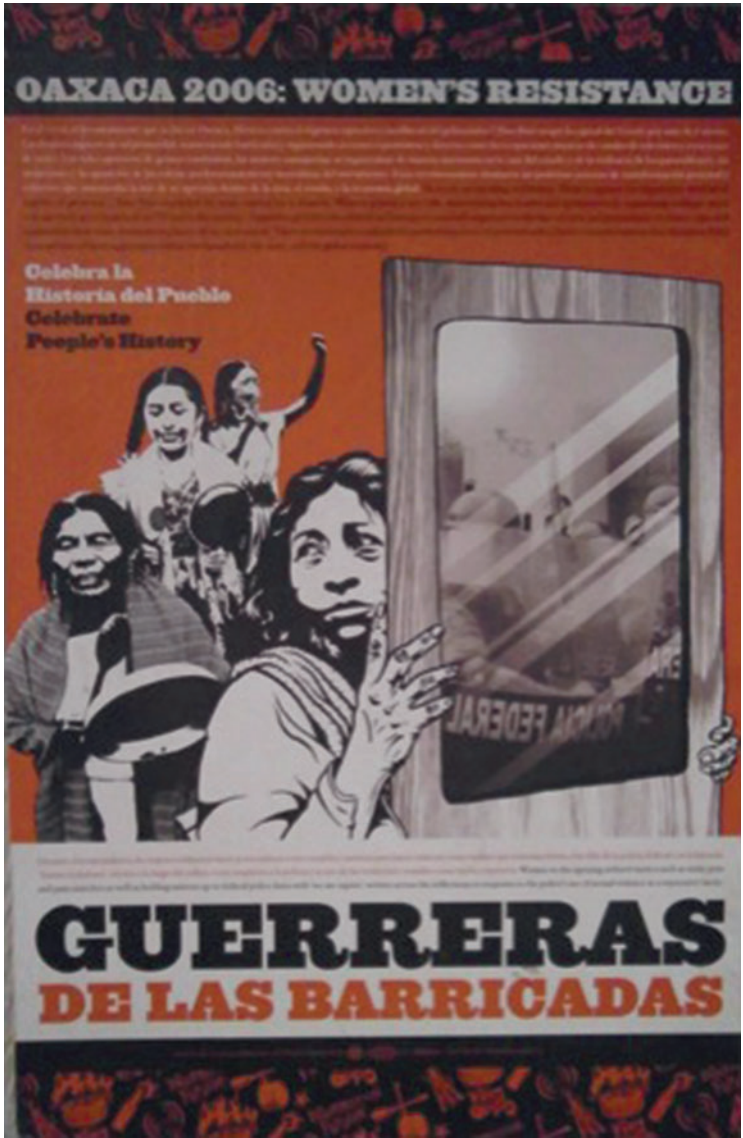


Fig. 5.2 A poster on the walls of Oaxaca about the women's participation in the 2006 Oaxaca teacher's rebellion. Courtesy of the artist (unknown), © Tijen Tunalı

Conclusion: Art Is Dead, Long Live Art

The common understanding of the avant-garde-engaged art in the 1960s asserted that a raised consciousness engendered by political art would provoke political action. Thus, the artwork's message of revolutionary struggle, as intended by the artist, would allow us to see the inherent contradictions of capitalism, and this should be essential for the critical awakening of society. This body of thought has its roots in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and it was carried forward by the 1968 revolutions. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the acts of artistic activism and political activism became increasingly blurred. However, Situationists and Dadaist took another step and sacrificed the figure of the artist to the social struggle.

The protests that raged around the world in 1968 included a large number of workers, students, and the lower class who were facing increasingly violent state repression. At present, civil unrest and protests around the world share similar aspects of the 1968 revolution; hence, the focus has shifted from the issue of sovereignty and class struggle to issues of equal representation (voice and visibility) and democracy. The protests against the WTO, IMF, and the G8 summit since the early 1990s, the violent riots in France in 2005 and in England in 2010, Occupy Wall Street Movement and the People's Revolution in Arab countries in 2011, as well as the mass revolts in Greece and Spain in 2012, and in Turkey and Brazil in 2013, are responses to the multiple dimensions of the neoliberal systemic crises. In one way or another, they address the political crisis related to democracy and civil rights. In these protests, activist artists incorporated unique forms of visual communication and experimental collaboration. Observing the Occupy protests David Graeber notes on the common traits of contemporary protests:

In fact, from the perspective of the activists, it is again process—in this case, the process of production—that is really the point. There are brainstorming sessions to come up with themes and visions, organizing meetings, but above all, the wires and frames lie on the floors of garages or yards or warehouses or similar quasi-industrial spaces for days, surrounded by buckets of paint and construction materials, almost never alone, with small teams in attendance, molding, painting, smoking, eating, playing music, arguing, wandering in and out. Everything is designed to be communal, egalitarian, and expressive. (Graeber, 2007, p. 382)

Similar to the theatrical attacks of the 1960s where the political performance of avant-garde aimed to fuse art and life, the political protests and uprisings created their own visual and social codes of collaboration and comradeship.

Gavin Grindon studied avant-garde's relation with the history of social movements and labor studies and made a poignant point that art's quest for autonomy relates to broader conceptions of autonomy found in social movements. Grindon argued that Dadaists and Situationists refused the role of the artist because they were connected to the working-class struggle and realized the value of artistic activity as labor power to be exploited. Thus, they refused to produce as an artist to be emancipated from the exploitative demands of capitalism—just like a worker on strike. Grindon noted:

Avant-gardes often did not conceive of themselves as a vanguard of artists leading the way, but as artists refusing the role of artists. This rupture with the idea of art was bound up with a rupture with the idea of work, which became a common theme among avant-garde groups, for whom dissidence was a matter of identity. The abolition of art was first a self-abolition. (Grindon, 2011, p. 84)

Situationists and Dadaists abolished art by abolishing art's exchange value and artist figure as the creator of aesthetic experience for the viewer. In 1970, Theodor W. Adorno, in his book *Aesthetic Theory*, noted: "... even the abolition of art is respectful of art because it takes the truth claim of art seriously" (Adorno, 1997, p. 43). As discussed earlier, the truth-claim of art died with the author/artist in the postmodern world. The question is what if the abolition of art takes place in places where who the artist is and what art is, is completely extraneous.

The aesthetic dimension of the recent political protests, revolts, and uprisings not only challenges and reformulates what is acceptable as politics in the society but also problematizes what is acceptable in society as art. Moreover, the contemporary activist -artist not just participates in protests and uprisings he/she joins the community programs, and works with educators, social workers, and even with scientists. In her infamous discussion in *Artforum*, Claire Bishop dismisses the political power of the socially engaged collaborative art and argues that those artists "self-sacrifice" their authorship in the name of "social bonding" and "community building" (Bishop, 2006). Bishop is right that the activist artist who engages in collaborative projects

denies his/her privileges, which could be seen, in a way, as self-sacrifice. This new figure in the art and community spaces leaves his/her superior position in the society as the avant-garde artist and becomes just another “doer” in the community. The artist’s role as a “doer” interrupts what is recognized in society as art—a creative and intellectual activity of a talented individual whose work carries a cultural value that could be transformed to exchange value. It is with this interruption that art makes itself political. It is in this instant the art could fulfill its political promise: the organization of dissent. Denying protest art’s or collaborative art’s capacity for politics is also a political act that not only confines art to its rigid borders but also blocks the avenues that art could open up to emancipate itself from such confinement.

In a world in crisis, art activism is more impulsive, regenerative, and communal because the new politics of struggle searches for ways to constitute communal spaces and relations without hierarchies—the first step to the practice of direct democracy. The struggle for a democratic life is related to the struggle of the democratic use of public and virtual space, which could be understood as the battlefield on which the conflicting interests of the dominating and the dominated are contested. According to Rancière, the intersection of aesthetics and politics is where this struggle takes place.

In their everyday lives activists, artists, and other anti-capitalist individuals seek to overcome personal traits and social relations that have grown out of the logic of the market (Pleyers, 2010, p. 22–23). They do this by creating the spaces of activism that are “sufficiently autonomous and distanced from capitalist society [to] permit actors to live according to their own principles, to knit different social relations and to express their subjectivity” (ibid. p. 39). These are spaces where imagination, play, and pleasure are embraced and where horizontality instead of hierarchies, participation instead of delegation, and heterogeneity instead of homogeneity are integral parts of political engagement (ibid. p. 43).

Neoliberal ideology perpetuates itself in person-to-person exchanges. Dimitris Papadopoulos reminds us that: “The pervasive strength of neoliberalism should perhaps be sought in the combination of more effective strategies or the accumulation of capital with a transformation of the government chiefly supported by a new understanding of the relations between the individuals, which stresses the aspect of exchange between them” (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 108). The realization of a revolutionary subjectivity especially lies in the new collective experience; connecting the

subject to the other subjects in ways that the individual would not experience during capitalist relations in the social order. In Rancière's theory, art's political agency stems from its refusal to be a part of the distribution of the sensible—the common meanings assigned to senses. In the spaces of activism, art refuses to be a part of the common everyday capitalist patterns, relationships, and what is allowed to be seen and said. Art becomes something out of art and more than art to be able to impact life.

The art activism at the barricades and many collaborative art practices in community art spaces invert common thought patterns, challenge established social and economic exchanges, and interrupt what is accepted as aesthetics in art. It is important to discuss why the art world is so determined to dismiss collaborative art as the mere popularization of engaged art. Alternative subjectivities, a non-hierarchical organization of the commons, and democratization of political representation in the form of equal participation pave the way to the end of contemporary politics. Perhaps the new condition of art signals the end of art as a system of definition, representation, and presentation, and the beginning of art as a social field to be constructed by disassociated arrangements of different individuals, communities, and societies.

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Dr. Tijen Tunalı holds a BS degree in Economics from Istanbul University and a BA in Fine Arts from the State University of New York at Binghamton. She completed her MA in Visual Arts at the State University of New York at Buffalo and her PhD in Art History at the University of New Mexico. She wrote her dissertation on the relationship of contemporary art and the neoliberal globalization.

PART III

Practice and Artistic Responses

Arte de Conducta: On Tania Bruguera's Tatlin's Whisper Series

Andrés David Montenegro Rosero

Abstract This chapter explores Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper* series (2006–present) as enactments of an artistic practice that wants to be directly inserted in reality. First, I trace the genealogy of *Arte de Conducta* as a reaction against the Anglo-European category of “Performance” art, which anchors her work to a cultural tradition outside of the English-speaking context. Then, I discuss how Bruguera's practice is informed by her engagement with the *Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante*, a short-lived correctional project that sought to re-educate and reintegrate Cuban youths into society. It concludes with an analysis of the *Tatlin's Whisper* series and how they activate images from the past to catalyse a critical awareness of the now, and by extension of the future.

Keywords Tania Bruguera · Performance art · *Arte de Conducta* · Behaviour Art · Free speech · Cuba

In December of 2014, in the immediate aftermath of the announcement of the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, Tania Bruguera (b. Havana, Cuba, 1968) tried to carry out a re-enactment of

A.D. Montenegro Rosero (✉)
Art History, Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, USA
e-mail: Andres.Rosero@bridgew.edu

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value
and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_6

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her controversial work *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*. As dictated by the 2009 intervention, for the 2014 version the artist wanted to create an unregulated public space where anyone could exercise the private right to free speech for a minute. Contrary to the “original” work, which took place inside the Centro Cultural Wifredo Lam, the most recent iteration was to be held at the *Plaza de la Revolución* (Revolution Square), one of the most contested sites in Havana, symbolically as well as historically. The 2009 version successfully created a public platform for freedom of expression, although it was abruptly stopped just after 40 minutes by governmental intervention. The 2014 version could not be carried out at all as the Cuban authorities detained Bruguera, collaborators, and other associates. Some of them, including Bruguera, were freed the day after, others many days later. Although not imprisoned, the authorities confiscated Bruguera’s passport preventing her from legally leaving the island—a situation that lasted for over 6 months.

This chapter explores the *Tatlin's Whisper* series (2006–present) as enactments of what Bruguera has called *Arte de Conducta* (Behaviour Art), an art that seeks to be directly inserted in reality. The first part of the essay traces the genealogy of Bruguera’s concept as a reaction against the Anglo-European category of “Performance” art, as well as a linguistic act of resistance that strongly anchors her works to a specific cultural tradition outside of the English-speaking geopolitical context. In the second part, I discuss how Bruguera’s *Arte de Conducta* is informed by her brief engagement with the *Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante* (School of Conduct Eduardo Marante), a short-lived correctional project that sought to reform and re-educate troubled Cuban youths in order to be integrated into society. It explores how the school’s understanding of art as a useful tool for the production of alterations in the behaviour of their pupils had a long-lasting impact for Bruguera’s works, which often seek to impart change in the ways through which we interact and inhabit the world. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the *Tatlin's Whisper* series and how they aim to activate well-known images from the past for the tactical re-evaluation of the present. I explore how the works dismantle specific historical and political imaginaries in order to catalyse a critical awareness of how they conduct themselves now, and by extension producing a change in the way that we behave in the future.

In a public lecture delivered in Madrid in 2010, Tania Bruguera argued in relation to her work: “the first thing is that I call it *Arte de Conducta* (Behaviour Art) and not performance, because first of all, performance is an English word, so it does not belong to my history.

We can say its tradition does not belong to me” (Bruguera 2010b, p. 63). Ironically, perhaps even paradoxically, Bruguera was catapulted into the international art scene through a series of works that have been historicised as performances, in the institutional sense of the word, which directly involved the body of the artist, and were structured through the repetition of an action over long periods of time. In *The Burden of Guilt* (*El peso de la culpa*) (1997–1999), perhaps Bruguera’s most “iconic” early work, the artist, clad in a sheep’s carcass, stood in a room and for 45 minutes, mixed Cuban soil and salt water into small pellets that she proceeded to ritualistically ingest (Pinto 2003). For *The Body of Silence* (*El cuerpo del silencio*) (1997–1998), Bruguera sat inside a metal box lined with pieces of raw meat and methodically wrote “corrections” into an official Cuban history book. These works were imbued with singular authorial intentions as they symbolically addressed a political reality. In the case of *The Burden of Guilt*, this meant bringing to the present a local historical event that described how the Tainos, an indigenous tribe settled in Cuba, decided to commit collective suicide by eating earth as an act of resistance against European colonisation (Posner 2009, p. 68). This action resonated with the situation at the end of the 1990s in the island which was characterised by extreme austerity and state censorship, a situation further explored by *The Body of Silence*. Both works also maintained the classical distinction between artist and audience as the audience was spared both the physical struggle implied by eating dirt or the political danger of correcting an official history book. Furthermore, the works could be easily turned into commodities, art products, through standard documentation, such as photographs or videos, reinforcing their character as artworks belonging to a recognised artistic tradition and from a particular artist. For many years, *The Burden of Guilt* has been the standard Bruguera piece featured in surveys of performance, or global, or Latin American Art such as Deborah Cullen’s exhibition and publication *Arte no es Vida* (Art Is Not Life) (2008), or Terry Smith’s *Survey of Global Contemporary Art* (2011), or Birnbaum, Butler, Cotter and Curiger’s *Defining Contemporary Art* (2011). It was also included in Coco Fusco’s *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (2000) and in Diana Taylor’s and Roselyn Costantino’s *Holy Terrors: Latin American Women Perform* (2003).

Instead of focusing on this kind of material, which according to the artist stands as a “failure” at being truly *Political Art* (Bruguera 2010a), I would like to explore how Bruguera’s work can be characterised as a

departure from performance art. While trying to rescue performance's core spirit—the value of the gesture—Bruguera's works exceed and overflow the logic of the “medium” and aim at collapsing the categories of life and art. Bruguera's performative deviations produce a kind of artwork that analyses and produces behaviour, which lives through memory, spreads through rumours, and becomes public by altering the social realm.

DON'T CALL IT PERFORMANCE...

In a 2007 interview with curator Rebecca Di Nardo, Bruguera spoke about her departure from performance art. She stated:

My work has come out of my discomfort. First with the visual arts and their inevitable distance from life and later, with performance art, beginning with its name: “performance,” a word in English that is linked to a cultural tradition that has nothing to do with my own. Many things have made me feel uncomfortable over the time with performance art: the expectations people have with it, its transformation into visual iconography and its apparent fatalism to become entertainment [*sic*]. (Bruguera and Di Nardo 2007, p. 79)

There are a few things worth highlighting from this dense passage. In the first place, it is important to underscore that most of Bruguera's works are driven by a deep sense of suspicion about established categories of art, in particular of performance art. In many of her accounts, there is a pervasive feeling that performance, as an institutionalised medium of contemporary art, has lost much of its relevance and urgency and has become just another art historical style or trope, sanitised and neutralised by institutionalisation. For Bruguera, this museification of the performative has severed performance art from its contextual relations, from its ephemeral quality, and from its political urgency (Bruguera 2010b). This kind of neutralised practice has turned ephemeral actions into still images valued for their potential posterity; site-specific actions have become “standards” or “canons” to be re-worked, re-enacted, and reprised in different contexts and at different historical times. Transformed into a pre-packaged, standardised style—as a well-defined product available in the toolkit of contemporary artistic practices—performance art, according to Bruguera, has forgotten about the value of the gesture and, therefore, lost all touch with the realities and necessities outside of the realm of art (Bruguera and Di Nardo 2007).

Bruguera's statement also clearly separates her work from mainstream performance art in geopolitical terms by underscoring the linguistic imposition involved in calling some work *performance* art, a category rooted in the English language. In a 2012 interview with Patricia Vasquez, Bruguera recounted how, when she left Havana to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999, she realised that her work was "much more linked to political actions/performances/issues in Cuba, Latin America and the former Socialist countries than practices coming from New York in the 70s" (Bruguera and Vasquez 2012, p. 29). Furthermore, she also commented on how the word *performance* itself had become a kind of a shibboleth for her, as whenever she pronounced (or miss-pronounced) the word with a thick Caribbean-Spanish accent it became evident that she was not a native speaker, nor a native US citizen, but a non-native English speaker. As she claimed: "The fact of being unable to pronounce the word performance well also made me think quite a lot whether I wanted to do something which I did not entirely master, precisely because, culturally, it did not belong to me" (Bruguera 2003). Bruguera's departure from performance is rooted in a serious linguistic analysis of the pertinence of the word *performance* for practices that originated in contexts very dissimilar to the ones described as the cradle of performance, that is, major Western cities, in particular, New York. At the same time, calling her work *performance* would fail to signal that her practice is sited in a different genealogy, in a different tradition, related to the artistic and socio-economic urgencies dictated by Latin American realities and, in particular, the Cuban context. By rejecting the term *performance*, Bruguera not only rejected the institutionalisation of the performative but also tied her work to what she calls a "Latin American tradition" that rescued the value of the gesture as the catalyst for ephemeral, contextually informed actions that tested the limits of the social and its relation with the personal (Curía 2009). This linguistic difference, along with the opinion that to speak of such practices in terms of *performance* was an act of intellectual and art historical colonisation (Bruguera and Vasquez 2012, p. 29), became the platform for a critique of the medium of performance art and for a more nuanced definition of her own practice.

Finally, it is important to highlight what most troubles Bruguera about performance art as a stylistic definition: "the expectations people have with it, its transformation into visual iconography and its apparent fatalism to become entertainment" (Bruguera and Di Nardo 2007, p. 79). As mentioned earlier,

The Burden of Guilt was for many years Bruguera's contribution to a variety of surveys on contemporary, Latin American, Global, Performance, or Feminist art. The vast majority of publications that included her work featured a very similar photographic documentation of *The Burden of Guilt*, where the artist's body covered by a sheep's carcass stands as a representation of the actual performative work. The majority of these images, in full colour and exuding high production values, bring the viewer's attention to the split carcass, the fresh flesh unfolded in front of our eyes. Paradoxically, this type of representation fails to recognise the most fundamental aspect of the performance, the physical ingestion of Cuban soil mixed with salt water, which during the late 1990s resonated with the Cuban context of scarcity and that, simultaneously, tapped into a historical legend of heroic resistance by the Tainos. A similar case can be made in terms of *The Body of Silence* where the imagery of raw flesh lining a small, cell-like room, dictated, for certain critics, the interpretation of the work as a Latin American take on Hermann Nitsch's actionist strand of performance art (Matt 2006, p. 64). Although Bruguera has publicly rejected this connection, even arguing that she was not aware of Nitsch's work until later in her career (Matt 2006, p. 64), these works were easily categorised, entrapped, and neutralised by a certain art historical exegesis and turned into documents disconnected from their original ephemerality and urgency. Just like representations of *The Burden of Guilt*, most of the documentation of *The Body of Silence* ignored Bruguera's action, her engagement in the rewriting of an official Cuban history book—ultimately thwarted by her own ingestion of the corrected pages due to fear of state-dictated repercussions. As both examples demonstrate, the works' reception and circulation reduced the symbolic and relevant actions to a snapshot detaching them from their temporality and contextual relations; live actions turned into frozen icons. In a 2006 interview, Bruguera commented on the expectations involved with performance art: "Then came the day when someone who had invited me to perform asked how many chairs I wanted in the space. I said to myself: okay . . . something is wrong here" (Matt 2006, p. 59). Her statement, very succinctly, but also very effectively, conveys one of the reasons for her dissatisfaction with the term: the very rigid expectations that the artworld has about performance art as a kind of theatrical entertainment. As her statement suggests, the term performance brings to mind a clear separation between artist and audience, an artist-/body-centred action that is clearly framed and defined as artistic which represents, symbolises, or comments on a particular context and that is there to be seen. As an event that is addressed from artist/author/performer to, or *towards* the spectator, it not only reinforces such dichotomies but also fosters a

contemplative reception, which makes the action easily objectifiable through photographic or video documentation. For Bruguera, performance is inextricably associated with spectacle, with entertainment (Matt 2006, p. 59).

ARTE DE CONDUCTA

For *Untitled (Rape Scene)*, staged in April of 1973, the Cuban-émigré artist Ana Mendieta, a student at the University of Iowa, invited some of her fellow classmates to her flat. Unbeknownst to them, Mendieta had recreated a rape and murder scene highly publicised in Iowa City. Based on photographic documentation and other press materials, she positioned herself as the victim of the crime for her friends to discover (Breen 2011). Intentionally, she had left her apartment door slightly open, inviting her guests to enter the flat and become witnesses to a crime. A few months later, for *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)*, and in response to the same murder, Mendieta poured blood in different parts of the city, a desolate alley or right outside of her house, and documented the reaction of casual pedestrians who, more often than not, seemed unfazed by the implied violence. The works were significantly different—*Untitled (Rape Scene)* was a carefully constructed tableau that replicated the news report down to the smallest detail, whereas *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)* was a much more gestural, reduced action (insofar as it did not involve the same emphasis on reproduction and staging of an actual event); *Untitled (Rape Scene)* personified the victim of a crime while *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)* only alluded to the body of the victim through the trace of her blood (Breen 2011). However, both works emphasised the immediate reaction to a provocative situation, be it the instantaneous, sudden reaction of her fellow students entering her apartment and, for a few moments, thinking her friend had been sexually attacked, *Untitled (Rape Scene)*, or the lack of public reaction to violence evinced by passers-by in *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)*. Furthermore, by engaging the immediate reaction of their dissimilar audiences—a private, friendly audience for *Untitled (Rape Scene)* and a public one for *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)*—both works directly engaged them by implicating them in the action as witnesses, observers, or participants. Mendieta's fellow students were not just guests, nor just audience members, but (apparent) witnesses to a crime scene. Similarly, the pedestrians in *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)* were not just pedestrians but unknowing participants being observed. According to

Bruguera, and although her engagement with Mendieta's work has been extensive, the aforementioned works by Mendieta were particularly important points of reference for her work (Goldberg 2004, p. 10). In an interview with RoseLee Goldberg, she described Mendieta's artistic strategy as "hyperrealistic, a hyperrealism that doesn't try to represent reality but to be inserted in it" (Goldberg 2004, p. 10). Mendieta's actions, according to Bruguera, studied and produced reactions and behaviours; the works triggered an automatic, immediate strong response cancelling the separation between the artistic action and its separation from other realms of activity, erasing the categorical differentiation between audience and participant (Goldberg 2004, p. 10).

Bruguera's notion of *Arte de Conducta* has been translated as Behaviour Art. This translation is problematic as the immediate associations and implications summoned by the word *behaviour* differ significantly from the Spanish word *conducta*. Whereas *behaviour* is usually associated with a particular set of manners, ways of life, attitudes or responses of an individual towards others (Oxford Dictionary 2010), *conducta* not only includes the way a person acts but also has a secondary meaning that highlights the ability to conduct, to direct, or to orchestrate (Real Academia de la Lengua Española 2010). Furthermore, *conducta* can also be associated with transference, as in the ability to be a conduit, a channel, or passageway for something else (Real Academia de la Lengua Española 2010). Finally, *conducta* also describes both the social behaviour of humans and more immediate, physiological reactions and responses of living beings generally—including, but not limited to, humans (Real Academia de la Lengua Española 2010). The multiplicity of meanings associated with the word *conducta*, therefore, clearly exceeds a narrow definition of *behaviour* understood as the "manner of bearing oneself," or in close relation to the word *good*—as in *good manners*—a marker of value judgements and measurement against an established rule or ideal (Oxford Dictionary 2010). In this way, and articulating a similar process of critique of the appropriateness of the word and category of *performance* art, Bruguera rejects the loose translation and emphasises the Spanish name with the intention of locating her practice in a different site, tradition, history, and language—a different genealogy altogether—from the hegemonic Anglo-speaking conventions. As she said to Patricia Vázquez, "It was important that the concept was in Spanish to highlight the fact that you were missing some cultural references, as well as stating clearly that it belongs to another tradition, another context" (Bruguera and Vasquez 2012, p. 29).

In this summary of Bruguera's understanding of the difference between *Arte de Conducta* and its translation, Behaviour Art, there is one last important point to highlight. Before she graduated from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) (The University of Arts of Cuba) in Havana in 1992, she started working at a short-lived, government-independent, foundation for the visual arts led by the Cuban painter, and ISA staff member, Tomás Sánchez (Bruguera 2007). Bruguera described the foundation's aspirations as follows: "The foundation had an ecological platform, including interpersonal relationships and society. Art was conceived of as an agent of change . . . He [Sánchez] wanted to create a program in which new ways to relate to others would be built in to the environment through art classes, thereby affording students a better social situation" (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). As her account suggests, the foundation's emphasis was the imbrication of art and life fostered by an understanding of art as a tool, a method, or a conduit, for fostering changes of behaviour, of habits and immediate responses, complemented by a belief in art's capability to act as a platform for the creation of better ways of sociability (Bruguera 2007, p. 65).

As part of her work for the foundation, Bruguera started teaching at "Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante"—loosely translated as "School of Conduct Eduardo Marante" or "Behavioural School Eduardo Marante." According to Bruguera, the School's name "was a euphemism for what really was a prison for kids ages five through sixteen" (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). The pupils had been sent there after they were found guilty for "low-risk" crimes, such as robbery, assault, vandalism, or fraud (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). Describing the institution, Bruguera wrote,

The goal in these schools (there are several in Havana and on the rest of the island) was to re-educate, to prepare students to "function" in society, to "adjust," to learn how to deal with authority in a non-confrontational way, to not let others manipulate them (many were working under orders from older people); in other words to change their social conduct. In cases where these achievements were not fulfilled, students went to an "Escuela de Oficios" (a trade school) where they continued their re-education and, in the process, learned a skill that would help them obtain an honest job afterwards and become integrated into society. (Bruguera 2007, p. 66)

As her account makes perfectly clear, the school's main objective was the re-education of troubled Cuban youngsters in an effort to encourage their

reintegration into productive society. Art, under this logic, was literally used as a “tool to provide people with some freedom, some calm, some attention or even a language to express their traumas,” as Bruguera commented (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). Through her art lessons, she was trying to effect a change in the conduct of her students, seeking to influence the lives and futures of her pupils, looking for “real results” in “real life,” not in the world of art. She commented: “I sought a change of behaviour that could be noticed, that could be ‘proved’” (Bruguera 2007, p. 66). This implied an actual change in the ways that a pupil reacted to reality, in his or her understanding of both the world and themselves. During her time in this correctional school, Bruguera was “creating reality” by trying to demonstrate that art could affect and change people’s lives, that its strategies could also be pragmatic and produce a change in her pupils. Art could have a function, or as Bruguera said “some sort of utility” (Bruguera 2007, p. 66).

TATLIN’S WHISPER SERIES (2006–PRESENT)

Bruguera’s notion of *Arte de Conducta* is further explored through the *Tatlin’s Whisper* series. The series is composed of a combination of actions in which the artist activates, as a direct participatory experience, images that have circulated in the press and other mass media outlets (such as a Molotov cocktail or a public podium) and which, by virtue of their ubiquitous presence and circulation, have lost their mobilising power. Paradoxically, however, in the *Tatlin’s Whisper* series, the images undergo a process of “de-contextualisation” where the images are plucked from their everyday circulation, and from the “event that gave way to the news,” in order to be “staged as realistically as possible in an art institution” (Pérez Moreno 2009). Under these parameters, Bruguera has produced several actions in different geographical locations, such as London, Moscow, or Madrid, seeking to de-anaesthetise past images sedimented in the social imaginary with the intention of formulating a critical re-evaluation of the present.¹

The images to which Bruguera refers have been entrenched in the construction of the identity of certain sites. As she has described, “it’s the quotation—the visual quotation—is an image I’ve seen on TV, in the news. And this is very important, because it’s how can you transform our main source of political education or bad education, which is the news, into something else?” [*sic*] (Tateshots 2008). Throughout the series,

certain images are constantly re-evaluated and re-signified in such a way that they become active tools for critique, not only of the past, but also of the discourse of the present. At the same time, the works foster a more direct relationship between the images selected and the audience members. As Bruguera argues, these images “have not been previously linked to a personal experience,” but through their deployment in *Tatlin's Whisper* they become appropriated by the spectator transforming what Bruguera calls an “intellectual political knowledge into a personal memory”² (Tenconi 2009).

Bruguera created *Tatlin's Whisper* #3 in 2006, for the Helga de Alvear gallery in Madrid. The work, as explained by the artist, consisted in “show(ing), with information downloaded from the Internet, the instructions to make a Molotov cocktail” (Bruguera 2010b). Simply put, it was a practical class on how to create incendiary bombs. It was staged during the opening night for one of the gallery's shows and offered, instead of cocktails, wine, and finger food, what Dinorah Pérez-Rementería called a “training workshop for making bombs” (Perez-Rementería 2008, p. 96). For this piece, Bruguera appropriated the symbolic image of the Molotov cocktail, an ever-present image of protests and political uprisings and revolutions. Usually confined to the street, to an active political moment, the image of the Molotov cocktail has circulated around the globe. The Molotov cocktail, however, although locally adapted and used for specific purposes which vary from country to country, has had a life of its own in the media, where every time there seems to be a social uproar, no matter where, the image on the newspapers the next morning always seems to make room for a person launching a Molotov cocktail, usually at the police.

As noted by Pérez-Rementería, the workshop, open to the general public, disregarded either suicidal or homicidal tendencies among the audience members (Perez-Rementería 2008, p. 96). For the duration of the class, the audience was exposed to dangerous chemicals, but more importantly, without them the “educational” component of the lecture would have been null and void. The audience, therefore, was responsible for what it would do with the information provided by Bruguera's workshop, which placed them as protagonists of the piece itself. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty suggests, in *Tatlin's Whisper* #3, “Bruguera happily sent her audience into the night armed with Molotov cocktails and the knowledge of how to make them: she *actually* made them *potentially* dangerous. Her Arte de Conducta assumes that art viewers are all ‘political people.’

And if we are not, she makes it so” (Lambert-Beatty 2009, p. 43). By staging a work where the audience members would learn about the ins and outs of making an incendiary device, Bruguera brought the “ideal” image of the Molotov cocktail, and its symbolic implications, into the realm of the personal and individual, where the knowledge of how to produce one could be used or not by the audience members. The work, initially, surprised the spectators by not fulfilling their expectations of a convivial opening night and instead bombarding them with information about bombs. This created a closer, more personal relation with the image of a Molotov cocktail that implied a certain degree of responsibility on the part of the viewer. *Tatlin’s Whisper #3* encouraged the participants to take responsibility for the possibility of embodying an image, to relate personally to the actions portrayed and not have a distanced—both historically and ideological—relation to an image of social disruption.

Tatlin’s Whisper #5, produced in 2008, also explored the ways in which audience members can become politically activated through a work of art. For this piece, staged at the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, Bruguera placed two mounted policemen who awaited the crowd of museum goers. The policemen directed the movements of the people by using riot and crowd control methods learned in the academy. With simple movements, accompanied by verbal directions to the bystanders, the mounted policemen choreographed the human topography of the space. As Griffin stated, “They [the policemen] marshalled the gathered audience around the gallery space with the quietly awesome authority with which the animals endowed them” (Griffin 2008). The image of mounted police, usually seen during riots, protests, or urgent situations of social unrest, is the one that is being rescued, and questioned, by *Tatlin’s Whisper #5*. As Bruguera argued, “Mounted police is something you can see in the photos of 68. You can see it in 1935, 1968 and 2000, you know, so it’s a kind of historically recurrent image of power. And always linked to a very specific political action in order—from the audience—I mean, from the people” (Tateshots 2008). By locating an actual set of mounted policemen who would actually direct the audience, the sterile image of abstract “mounted police” became a live experience for the spectator and created a closer emotional relation to that image. For this work, the audience had to comply with several commands made by the policemen, either verbally or physically suggested by the sheer bodily might of their horses. The action, therefore, as noted by Santiago Olmo,

“reproduced power relations between policemen and people in the streets . . . but inside a museum” (Olmo 2010, p. 14).

It is important to mention that the work was a surprise to the majority of the visitors. It intruded policemen into a civil space that is supposed to be free from direct police control. This intrusion implied an ideological dislocation of a particular place; Tate Modern suddenly became a space for the organisation of people; there was a repressive hand in an artistic institution. As Pérez-Rementería noted, “The police were convoked beforehand in order to prevent unhappy incidents. But, at the same time, the police themselves were the cause of the disruption and the disarray among the viewers, since nobody expected to be so controlled” (Pérez-Rementería 2008, p. 97). The policemen were put in a double position where, on the one hand, they were feared and intimidating, while on the other, they were “keepers of the peace” in case some catastrophe struck. They were the silent, yet active, markers of power, surveillance, and control.

Tatlin's Whisper #5 emphasised what Griffin called the “behavioural responses in the audience that are ingrained on many levels: respect for men in uniform, fear of animals and passive subjection before an artwork and a performer” (Griffin 2008). By highlighting what Jiménez called the physical, embodied, corporal experience of “control and manipulation mechanisms” (Jiménez 2009, p. 64), the work encouraged the audience to re-evaluate their responses, their preconceptions, when faced with an authority figure. The artist, therefore, explores the tensions and complexities that direct individual behaviour in a public sphere. At the same time, in *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, the artist's treatment of the audience, as what Lambert-Beatty called a “mob” (Lambert-Beatty 2009, p. 43) that could potentially be disturbing and therefore closely controlled and organised, considered the space of Tate Modern not as a zone of freedom, but as a coercive area that conditioned, and still conditions, behaviour. The embodied and living image of the mounted policeman, therefore, became the means by which to analyse, and perhaps try to change, the behaviour of the spectator.

Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version) (2009) was presented at the Centro Cultural Wifredo Lam in Havana as part of the Tenth Havana Biennial. For it, the artist constructed and installed a stage where a podium with a microphone permitted a minute of free expression to any visitor who attended the event. Two actors dressed in military uniforms, every once in a while, placed a trained dove on the shoulders of whomever was using the microphone flanked this podium. Before the action had officially

begun, Bruguera had distributed 200 disposable cameras among the public, surrendering any artistic/authorial right to document the action to the attending audience members (Bruguera 2010c). Nearly 40 people took advantage of Bruguera's opportunity to express themselves freely, some clamoured for freedom, some demanded a radical change in Cuban government, some openly criticised the government's antidemocratic and repressive apparatus, others, overwhelmed by emotion, could not articulate a word and simply cried.

A few days after the event, the Biennial's organising committee released a press statement rejecting and criticising the individuals that had participated in Bruguera's action. The committee branded the participants as "professional dissidents," "opportunists," and described them as servants "of the anti-Cuba propaganda machine," who "repeated the worn out clamour of 'freedom' and 'democracy' demanded by their sponsors" (Comité Organizador 2009). The organising committee immediately tried to disassociate itself from the event and from the comments made by the participants, arguing that those who took to the microphone took advantage of the situation and co-opted and instrumentalised with political intentions a work of art (Comité Organizador 2009). The press release finished with the following sentence, "Rising above these provocations, the Biennial will continue to be that space for anti-hegemonic rebelliousness, of heresy and authentic dissidence that definitively conquered the Cuban Revolution for the artists of Cuba and the world" [*sic*] (Comité Organizador 2009).

According to Mosquera, within the context of Cuba, this work took advantage of the relative permissibility that characterises the world of art in order to create a space where, contrary to the immediate reality, a public tribune could exist. The work countered the long governmental control of public spaces and collective addresses, fulfilling the Revolution's broken promise of free exchange of ideas. As Bruguera noted in an interview with Yanét Pérez Moreno, "The work had an open structure where the responsibility fell on the audience. With it, I put forward a different space to talk about Cuban reality. I would like to consider it a model where privilege is used and not simply enjoyed" (Pérez Moreno 2009).

Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version) sought to re-energise a mass-media image from the past. In this instance, the image that Bruguera brings to the present was a famous photograph of Fidel Castro giving one of his most well-known speeches in 1959. During this public

address, Castro was surrounded by uniformed men and engaged in a passionate speech when, suddenly, a white dove landed on his shoulders. To many Cubans, followers of afro-Cuban religious practices, the fact that a white dove landed on Fidel's shoulders meant a divine seal of approval, a mystical act of recognition of the new national leader (Santiago 2009). By imitating this historical moment, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* mobilised Cuba's historical memory by bringing to a present characterised by government repression and control, the ghost of one of the foundational moments of the contemporary Cuban state. Castro's privilege, the power that made it possible for him to address an entire nation, was dispersed and atomised towards the silenced members of the audience. In this way, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* not only opened to contemporary critique and debate the existing conditions of repression in Cuba, but also made possible a critical re-evaluation of the past through a democratic and participative dialogue. Although highly controversial, the work had been approved and officially sanctioned by the Biennial's organising committee. The committee, however, was not prepared, or did not expect, that so many Cubans would be willing to loudly, and publicly, voice their opinions, mostly critical of the Cuban governmental apparatus. In a context characterised by repression of dissidence, perhaps the Committee expected the podium to remain empty, devoid of any participation. This scenario, the possibility of no one willing to speak, was also factored into the genesis of the work as Bruguera considers the installation itself as a monument to the Cuban silenced. If, for example, no one had stepped up to the podium, the work would have become a living index of extreme levels of self-censorship, a cruel reminder of the impossibility of freedom of expression. The empty podium would reproduce Antonia Eiriz's painting of an empty tribune, *Una tribuna para la paz democrática (A Tribune for Democratic Peace)* (1968), therefore confirming all the fears and doubts that led the painter into forced exile in the late 1970s. Although the work succeeded in inviting others to participate, the phantom of their absence was also taken into account (Bruguera 2010a).

Within the context of Cuba, the encouragement of freedom of expression, the abolition of censorship, and the equal valuation of everyone's opinions are radical political actions. As a result, the work does not only offer a representation of the repressive circumstances in Cuba but an actual enactment of political agency. The work successfully breached the limits between art and life by offering a chance for freedom of expression

through, and by, an artistic platform. The work's consequences, each minute of free speech as well as the subsequent condemnation of them by the Organising committee, took place beyond the realm of art; each minute spoken was not just an audience member participating in a work of art, but also moments of individual, civilian empowerment. As a "performance that snowballed into an unexpected, spontaneous political rally" (Mosquera 2009, p. 26), as described by Mosquera, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* not only created an opportunity for political action, but effectively enacted it for 39 minutes and for 39 different people. By imitating a foundational historical moment, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* mobilised Cuba's historical memory by bringing to the present—characterised by government repression and control—the ghost of one of the foundational moments of the contemporary Cuban state—paradoxically, a moment of public expression.

In December of 2014, in the immediate aftermath of the announcement of the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, Bruguera tried to carry out a re-enactment of her controversial work *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*. As dictated by the 2009 intervention, for the 2014 version the artist wanted to create an unregulated public space where anyone could exercise the right to free speech for a minute. Contrary to the "original" work, the most recent iteration was to be held at the *Plaza de la Revolución*, one of the most contested sites in Havana, symbolically as well as historically. However, the 2014 version could not be carried out at all as the Cuban authorities detained Bruguera, collaborators, and other associates, on the day, or eve, of the event. Some of them, including Bruguera, were freed the day after, others spent many days detained. Although not imprisoned, the authorities confiscated Bruguera's passport preventing her from legally leaving the island—a situation that lasted for over 6 months, from late December 2014 until July 11, 2015.

Bruguera's public reiteration of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* was part of a broader platform initiated by the artist called #YOTAMBIENEXIJO, translated as #IALSODEMAND. This civic movement calls for the restitution of civil, political, economic, and cultural rights to all citizens in Cuba through artistic actions that provide concrete solutions to specific public needs (Bruguera 2014, 2014a). The restaging of the 2009 work sought to, on the one hand, trigger the participation of Cubans in an act of free speech. On the other, it hoped to reclaim an important symbolic public arena—the *Plaza de la Revolución*—as a space for a possible insurrection against State limits on

political dissent, free speech, freedom of the press, or political diversity within the island. Importantly, although the work was proposed to the Cuban authorities via the official channels, it was not a sanctioned event, as the government never granted Bruguera a permit for a gathering in a public square. Notwithstanding, Bruguera tried to undertake the work and was detained on December 30, before she could carry it out.

Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta* has real consequences. As demonstrated by the failed restaging of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*, one of the main outcomes of the work was State repression. The 2014 attempt seemed to confirm all expectations regarding the Cuban government and its intolerance for dissidence. The visceral rejection of the first iteration of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* by the Biennial organising committee was echoed by the suppression of its re-enactment. During a time of renewed talk about systemic changes in Cuba, these instances of censorship reaffirmed what Cuban art critic Glexis Novoa, among many others, argues is a repressive and dictatorial State apparatus (Santiago 2009). Bruguera's 2014 iteration questioned how Cubans could conduct themselves in important public spaces, provoking a behavioural response from the Cuban authorities. Bruguera's thwarted attempt at recreating *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* also catalysed a global response against the Cuban authorities from artists, curators, philosophers, and other important intellectual and political figures from all over the globe. For example, a *New York Times* Editorial condemned Bruguera's detainment (Archibold 2016). Additionally, several museums including the Guggenheim, MoMA, Tate Modern, the Hammer, or the Queens Museum, publicly restaged *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* in different public spaces of their institutions as a sign of solidarity (Chung 2015; Tateshots 2015; Hammer Museum, 2015). Their support and demand for her release was voiced through editorials, articles and interviews, social and other digital media. At a time of growing optimism about the possibilities for change within the island—at a political, economic, and social level—the cancellation of Bruguera's work came as a timely reminder of the challenges that accompany the thawing of relations between Cuba and the US.

However, as pointed out by Cuban-American artist and intellectual Coco Fusco, the reiteration of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* did not trigger the kind of response from "the Cuban people" as it did from the government or the international artistic/intellectual community (Fusco 2015). In one telling image widely circulated through several social media platforms, the *Plaza de la Revolución* is seen completely empty

except for several cameras mounted on tripods. These belonged almost exclusively to international newscasters. Fusco argues:

Bruguera's reliance on the internet to convene the Cuban public has provoked a certain degree of skepticism from critics about her intentions. "The Cuban people" did not show up at the plaza and it is likely that most Cubans on the island have no idea of what #YOTAMBIENEXIJO is. (Fusco 2015)

This points to an important paradox at the heart of Bruguera's initiative. Perhaps tight control on media outlets and the Internet limited the local reach of the project's call to exercise free speech, or self-censorship also drove the notable absence of Cubans at the site. Whatever the reason, there was little immediate response to the project by the Cuban public. Albeit delayed, however, #YOTAMBIENEXIJO has arguably had a long-lasting local impact.

While Bruguera's passport was confiscated she met with various local activists and political dissidents, such as prisoner and fellow artist Danilo Maldonado Machado (El Sexto). She also began several artistic projects within her home, including a continuous reading of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, broadcast to the street through loudspeakers. These activities contributed to the creation of the *Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt* (INSTAR) (Institute of Art Artivism), an independent organisation supported by a *Kickstarter* fundraising campaign and fully autonomous from the Cuban government. Inaugurated in 2016 in Havana, the goal of the institute is to "transform ideas into civic actions" and "foster civic literacy and policy change" in Cuba (Bruguera 2015). As an extension of Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta*, INSTAR, #YOTAMBIENEXIJO, and the *Tatlin's Whisper* series seek to create useful art that instigates change in the present. They view behaviour as "the language that society uses" in order to regulate subjectivities and as a tool for political and social change (Tenconi 2009).

NOTES

1. According to Bruguera, the works belonging to the *Tatlin's Whisper* series seek to,

... activate images, well-known because of having been repeatedly seen in the press, but are here decontextualised from the original event that gave way to the news and staged as realistically as possible in an art

institution. The most important element in this series is the participation of spectators who may determine the course the piece will take. The idea is that next time spectators face a piece of news using similar images to those they experienced, they may feel an individual empathy with that distant event towards which they will normally have an attitude of emotional disconnection or informative saturation. The experience of the audience within the piece may allow them to understand information in a different way and appropriate it because of having lived through it. (Pérez Moreno 2009).

2. The name of the series, Tatlin's Whisper, is relevant for two reasons. In the first place, the title alludes to what the artist calls "the present weakening of the impact of a moment of Western history in which great transformations took place as the result of social revolutions." By this we can understand that Tatlin's Whisper tries to highlight the historical process by which once radical, avant-garde artistic practices, such as Vladimir Tatlin's art and architectural career, have become domesticated and assimilated by hegemonic discourses and ideologies. According to Bruguera, the series explores how "the intensity, credibility and exaltation of socialist revolutions, just as Tatlin's tower, which was never built, were frustrated and utopia is rethought with the effort implied in a weak whisper." By conjuring the avant-garde aesthetic project of Tatlin in its title, the series redefines his practice based upon its failure and not its projected monumentality. In the Tatlin's Whisper series, utopian grand schemes are rendered small, ephemeral, almost powerless whispers. The series revise "an icon of the enthusiasm and grandiosity of the Bolshevik Revolution"—as she describes Tatlin—and re-evaluates the "intensity, credibility and exaltation of socialist revolutions," which, in many cases and as exemplified by Monument to the Third International, have been characterised by failure in the implementation of utopian designs (Pérez Moreno 2009).

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Dr. Andrés David Montenegro Rosero Assistant Professor of Art History,
Department of Art and Art History, Bridgewater State University, USA.

PERCENT FOR GREEN: Creating Space as Consciousness

Alicia Grullón

Abstract PERCENT FOR GREEN deals with looking at climate change in the Bronx and how art can serve community. It is a social practice art project that has consisted of roundtables, workshops, and planning with Bronx-based grassroots organizations for the People's Climate March in 2014. It entails the creation of a functioning green bill created by participants through art. The goal is to pass a bill allotting funds from city-funded construction projects to sustainable green initiatives overseen by small grassroots organizations in Environmental Justice (EJ) communities in New York City. This chapter considers education as a possible medium in social practice projects and takes a close look on the idea of learning, collective consciousness, US educational trends, and how social practice art appears within this backdrop.

Keywords Social practice art · Education · Climate change · Urban Populations · Consciousness · Learning

A. Grullón (✉)

Interdisciplinary, State University of New York at New Paltz, New Paltz, USA
e-mail: becomingmyth@gmail.com; alicia@laundromatproject.org

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value
and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_7

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STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

In his 2014 article for *Salon.com*, Eric Levitz interviewed David Blacker, an educational philosopher, on his views regarding learning. In the interview, Blacker conveyed that any educational reform within the current capitalist system is not possible because everything is governed by it. His implied definition of school is “an institution of education so deeply structurally tied to a certain trajectory of capitalism that it is not amenable to structural reforms” (Levitz, 2014). As such for Blacker, any new changes or restructuring could only occur through a complete societal overhaul brought on by an inevitable structural collapse forcing change. In order to view the ways in which education is being treated, the chapter begins with Barak Obama’s call for “making education a national mission.” Reminiscent of the 2001 congressional act *No Child Left Behind*, this new agenda continues to tighten the link between education and its treatment as a mass product. Any national agenda needs to be considered from within the economic and political systems as it is these systems that shape the country’s ideology. Making education a national mission is to imply “expenditures on education, training, medical care and so on as investments in human capital” (Becker, 2008). Under these terms, capital aggregation becomes less equal and further implies that even in education it is necessary to maintain a level of inequity in the marketplace in order to boost competition as capital is further increased by competition. It testifies to the increase of capital in order to meet the needs of production. Education under agendas like these exists as another driver toward normalization that does not improve access to materials or environments where learning and collective consciousness can take place. Blacker’s argument is that these policies become mechanisms for further categorizing and “weeding out” people who cannot normalize sustaining a dependency on hierarchal power. Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Post-modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) explores the larger economic system’s demand of the general population to sustain and maintain its purpose of increasing productivity and the “growth of power” of the few. According to Lyotard, by optimizing the system’s performance, which “demands both less work and more,” those in power do less and the powerless do more (Lyotard, 1984, xxiv). The prison has become an extension of life and learning for many urban youth. And the operations of the prison are emulated in everyday spaces, as security guards carry pepper spray, metal detectors are installed at entrances, and surveillance cameras and armed police patrol school

grounds. One student I worked with in the South Bronx, in New York City, described his experience of trying to break up a fight between friends at school:

I was surrounded by eight security guards. One of them was screaming in my ear to shut up. I had my hands down in front of me. They wouldn't let me explain what had happened and what I was trying to do . . . I was then suspended for trespassing by the principal of another school on a different floor. (Personal communication, May 2015)

In communities already suffering from a lack of resources, these circumstances create deep psychic wounds. A complete dehumanizing of the individual is provoked as s/he learns to abide by a structure of scarcity, abandon, and fear. The collective consciousness being created is isolated and desperate. As a consequence, the point of view this type of system creates is one where the

Oppressed receive the euphemistic title of “welfare recipients”. They are treated as individual cases, marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a “good, organised, and just” society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. (Freire, 1970, p. 74)

PERCENT FOR GREEN AND WHERE IT'S AT

PERCENT FOR GREEN is a social practice art (SPA) project focused on addressing climate change effects in the Bronx and my role as an artist serving the community. The project's goal is to pass “PERCENT FOR GREEN” legislation. Modeled after the “Percent for Art” program, a legislation passed in 1985 in New York City that allotted 1% of budgets eligible for city-funded construction projects to art, “PERCENT FOR GREEN” legislation would set aside 1% of budgets and dedicate this to expanding green spaces and sustainable initiatives in Environmental Justice (EJ) communities in New York City (see Appendix to read the bill courtesy of the artist). “PERCENT FOR GREEN” legislation has become part of the Bronx Climate Justice Platform, a collection of principles and demands by grassroots organizations that united to take action during and after the People's Climate

March in 2014. These partners include Mothers on the Move, South Bronx Unite, La Finca del Sur (Farm of the South), Nos Quedamos (We Stay), Bronx Climate Justice North, Friends of Tibbett's Tail, The BLK Project, Friends of Brook Park, and Kelly Street Gardens. These groups focus on pollution, the economy, food justice, alternative energy resources, green jobs, and protecting the commons. PERCENT FOR GREEN was a part of InClimate a five-borough-wide project conceived by Regina Cornwell and presented under the auspices of Franklin Furnace Archives and its founder-director Martha Wilson. InClimate's initiative "calls upon artists, with the assistance of climate change specialists and lawyers, to find solutions and antidotes to society's most cataclysmic problem with the aim to see the art, together with accompanying events, encourage and embolden community members and their leaders to take action on climate change." The Bronx is my catalyst and model. It interests me because I have grown up in New York City and as I continue to live and raise a family here I want to see it improve. Over one-fifth of the Bronx is park space, yet it has some of the highest asthma rates in the country. The Bronx is also the poorest urban congressional county in the USA in one of the world's wealthiest cities. As a lifelong resident, my interests lie in keeping the dialogue on climate change going among residents in the hope that they will continue the dialogue with others in their community.

The South Bronx is at the front line of climate change in New York City. According to the US census report, it is home to a minority in majority, with the borough's population made up predominantly of recent generations of immigrants from the Global South and the Caribbean, as well as African Americans. Due to a legacy of environmental racism and vicious redlining it has become a sacrifice zone an area deemed dispensable, and therefore susceptible to bad urban planning, a lack of clean and safe green space, teeming with air pollution, and an overwhelming abundance of food deserts where finding fresh produce is impossible. Ironically, the South Bronx is also home to the city's largest wholesale food market, the Hunt's Point Food Market, which distributes to the entire Northeastern US. The Food Market is complemented by another stark reality of the South Bronx as it is also a site for:

...almost one-third of New York City's trash which is handled at waste transfer stations in the South Bronx, and then trucked or sent by rail to landfills across the region. According to New York Lawyers for the Public

Interest, about 2,000 of the 6,400 tons handled in the South Bronx on an average day in 2013 was residential. Residential trash is ultimately shipped by rail out of the Bronx via the Harlem River Yard, which is privately managed. The rest of the trash processed in the South Bronx is commercial waste, including construction . . . And while the South Bronx has numerous expressways running through it, there is no direct access from those highways to some of the South Bronx's most important industrial areas. Trucks must travel on local streets to get from the Bruckner Expressway to the Hunts Point Peninsula, for instance. The market generates enormous truck traffic, an estimated 15,000 trips daily, according to the City. (Crean, 2015)

These highways were part of a grand modernizing plan in the 1950s spearheaded by the urban planner Robert Moses, who bulldozed massive construction projects through thriving minority neighborhoods, paving highways and expressways that dissected the Bronx and created both psychological and physical barriers that are still present today. Due to these conditions, it is believed that had Superstorm Sandy (2012) hit New York City six hours earlier at high tide the South Bronx area would have looked much like areas of Rockaway, Queens, which were flooded with “not just water but heavy chemicals and detergents the legacy of systemic environmental racism that allowed toxic industries to build in areas inhabited by mostly people of colour” (Klein, 2014, p. 106). The undoing of Moses' racist legacy has been a difficult and slow one. However currently included in the US Secretary of Transportation Anthony Fox's projects are plans to decommission some of the underused expressways, including one in the South Bronx for the Sheridan Expressway, which offers some promise for change (Naylor, 2016).

In 2014, with support from the Bronx Council on the Arts and Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York, I was able to inaugurate PERCENT FOR GREEN at the Longwood Art Gallery at Hostos Community College. I specifically approached the Longwood Gallery for the launch because it was founded in 1968 amidst marches and protests that drew inspiration from student movements taking place all over the world that year. It was created by an act by the Board of Higher Education of New York City in direct response to protests by the largely Puerto Rican community and its allies that called for an academic institution that served the people of the South Bronx.

For six weeks in the gallery, visitors were invited to directly add to or edit the “PERCENT FOR GREEN” bill I had drafted (Fig. 7.1). The bill hung

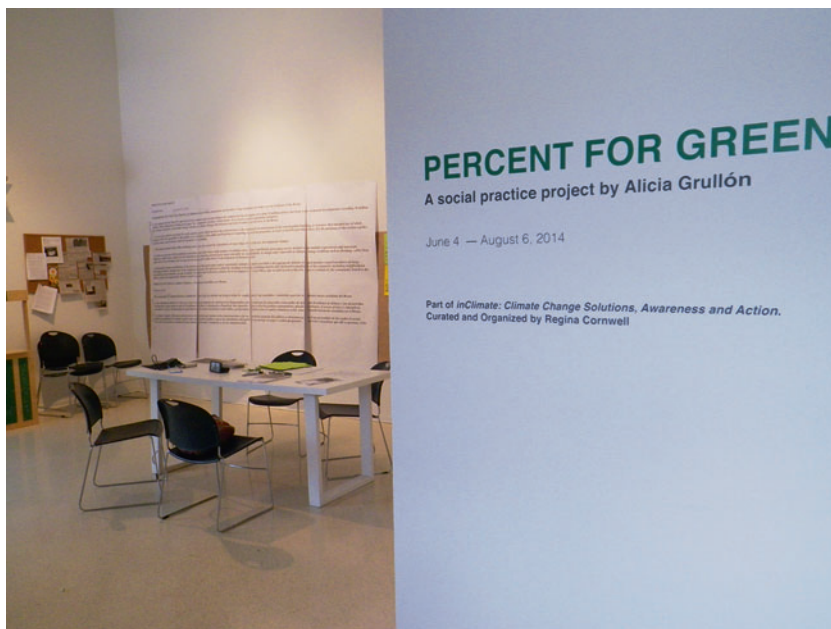


Fig. 7.1 Overview of PERCENT FOR GREEN workspace Longwood Arts Gallery. Courtesy of artist and created solely by the author, Alicia Grullón

against the gallery wall enlarged to $8' \times 12'$ paper panels. Ideas were collected and edited into the final draft, becoming a direct product of community engagement and underscoring the possibility of democratic resolve through art. Apart from the bill, programming consisted of conversations and gatherings that stimulated candid opportunities for philosophical talks about life and society. I asked visitors who came in to sit and talk with me on environmental issues and problems around them. Our conversations touched on the economy, education, public health, and infrastructure. Conversations were also taken out of the gallery onto the streets in a portable makeshift pop-up stand called, “Three-one-one/El-tres-uno-uno,” after New York City’s unique phone number “311” which residents can use to make civil complaints and obtain transit information or any other assistance they may need that is not an emergency. I invited passersby to talk about concerns they had where they lived and then, acting as their representative, placed a call to 311.

PERCENT FOR GREEN also generated roundtable programming events with local activists and gallery attendees. One such roundtable was entitled “On the Ground: Women, Inner Dialogues, and Communal Transformation” with food justice activist Tanya Fields from the BLK Project, a solar-powered school bus delivering fresh produce to South Bronx food deserts, and community garden manager Rosalba Ramirez from the Kelly Street Gardens. Their roundtable connected to the project by looking at how identity is reflected onto the environment and how the process of empowering women brings about new ways of relating to land, work, business, and community. Another roundtable was facilitated by South Bronx Unite, who explored the notion of the commons and alternative choices for sustainable redevelopment along the Port Morris waterfront area in the Bronx. South Bronx Unite is an organization made up of local residents organizing to contest the city’s decision to allow a commercial food distributor (Fresh Direct) to build on state-owned land without due process from residents and cutting residents’ access to the Harlem River. I also facilitated a workshop myself on art and activism with teen fellows from the Bronx Civic Scholars Institute at Hostos College. We conducted surveys on people’s thoughts about climate change on the Hostos campus and then formulated the information we gathered into graphs to be displayed in the gallery space along with the bill (Fig. 7.2). We interviewed 100 people and summarized our findings, which, among other things, told us how urgent most people believe climate change is, and that they believe it is affecting their lives.

PERCENT FOR GREEN also had a community workshop component that focused on local residents as practitioners. Through open calls community residents submitted proposals for workshops based on a skill they wanted to share. One of these included a 90-minute workshop on indoor vermiculture composting, while another focused on self-irrigating planters for urban apartments. I also initiated English as a Second Language classes for a group of *Garifuna* women, Afro-Latina climate refugees from Honduras through the organization Mothers on the Move. Among other things, these exchanges sprung up conversations that explored the importance of supporting informal urban economies, economies that may not always be monetarily based but are necessary to mitigate survival in an increasingly expensive city.

Another critical and continuing component of PERCENT FOR GREEN is a curriculum I created for facilitating discussions around climate change for urban youth and adults. I first implemented the

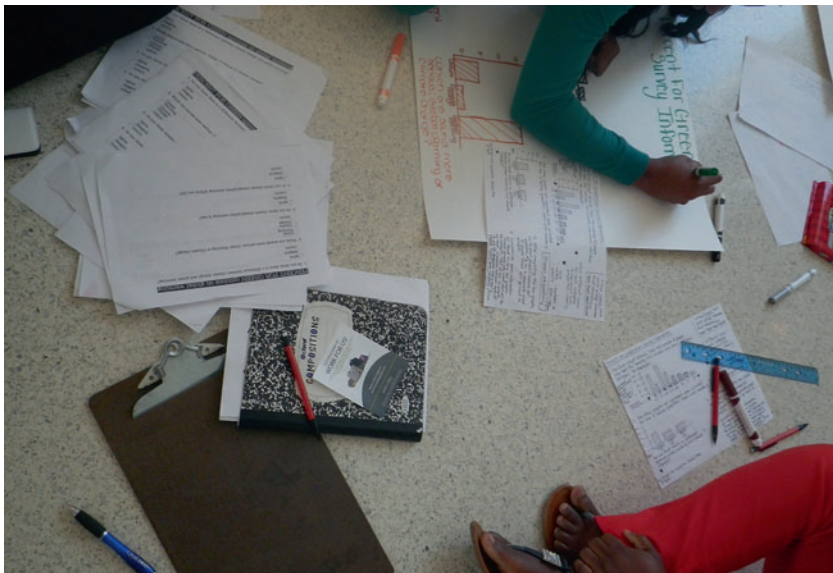


Fig. 7.2 High school students from Bronx Civic Scholars completing surveys to put up in workspace Gallery. Courtesy of artist and created solely by the author, Alicia Grullón

curriculum for the New York City Youth Summer Employment Program at The Point CDC with policy organizers and teaching artists, and with funding from Casita Maria Center for Arts & Education and Bronx Works, I was able to hold a 6-day workshop in New York City public housing. I have conducted more condensed workshops for the Creative Time Summit in 2015 in Brooklyn and for the second Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts conference in 2015. The premise of the curriculum is to focus on how to break down climate change and connect it to daily urban lives in the South Bronx. Climate change is not taught as part of the science curriculum in the public schools, nor is it an urgent topic on major news and media outlets. For many of the participants in my workshops, the PERCENT FOR GREEN curriculum is often the first time people have devoted an extended amount of time to actively thinking and talking about climate change. The workshops explain how environmental racism occurs and is directly linked to climate change. Some youth were able to

look at the science of climate change with scientist Dr. Debra Tillinger from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, whom I invited in order to answer questions about the scientific side of climate change that I could not. They spent time with Dr. Tillinger looking at future models of the earth and at the increasing patterns of stronger storms and natural disasters. For the culmination of the longer-term workshops, participants worked on creating a variety of responses that took forms including spoken word, circus performance, and visual art and broadsides (Figs. 7.3 and 7.4), which showcased their thoughts on the material and enabled them to share their solutions for addressing climate change. By the end of the workshops the youth were able to actively talk about climate change, and left with tools with which to consider society's consumption habits as starting points for change. Rather than oppressing or forcing the community to concede to a banking model of learning, where facts are memorized and dictated by an authority figure, as described in Paulo Freire's 1970 work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the

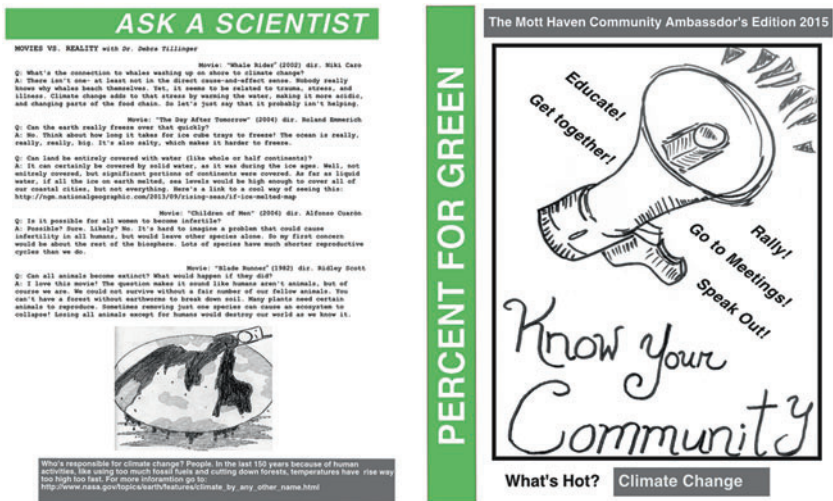


Fig. 7.3 Mott Haven Community Ambassador's broadside front and back pages by youth from New York City Housing Authority's Betances Houses in Mott Haven, the Bronx. Courtesy of artist and created solely by the author, Alicia Grullón

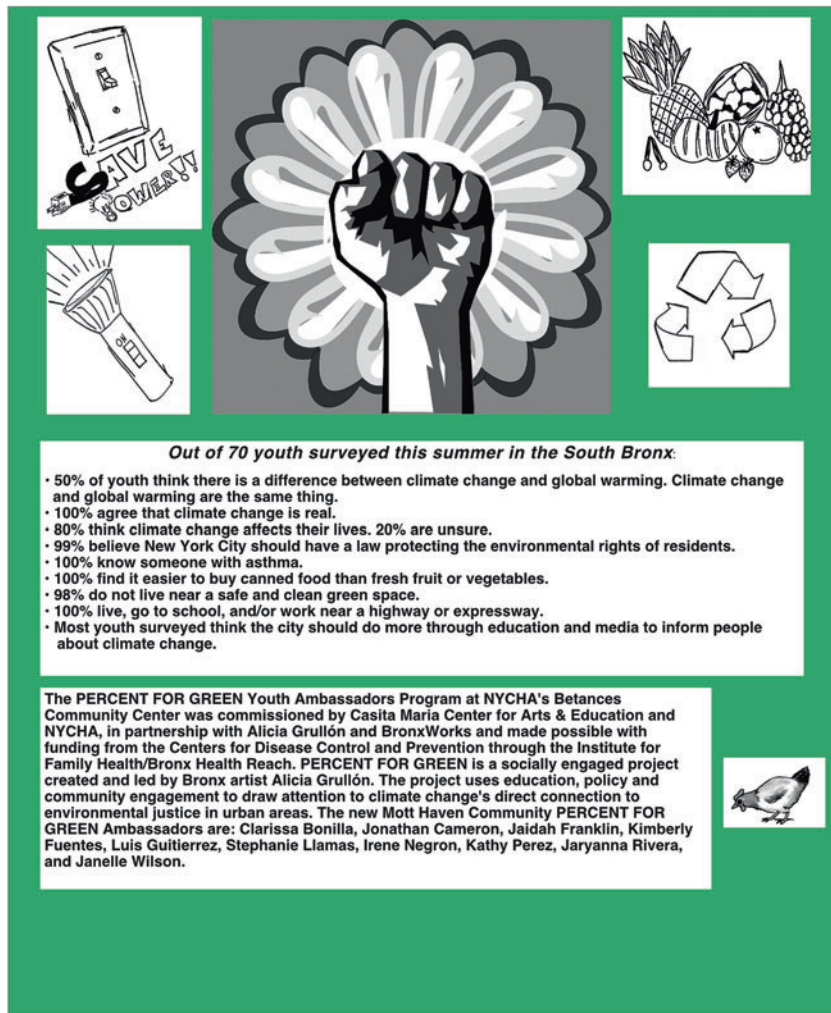


Fig. 7.4 Mott Haven Community Ambassador's broadside inside poster detailing statistics about the health of youth taking the workshops. Courtesy of artist and created solely by the author, Alicia Grullón

learning that occurred took current issues, identity, experiences, and history as points of departure for transforming consciousness.

The lack of environmental protection that residents in underserved areas have access to is another condition under which PERCENT FOR GREEN operates. By highlighting our connections first to place locally, in order to address our global connections, the complexities of climate change are easily connected to the environmental disregard of marginalized communities. I have observed that if residents document and discuss how they see their community, their ownership over it will be increased in ways that may prove critical in action against planning and policy. Consequently, this brings up questions regarding sustainability, ecology, health, and the history of class and racism in US cities. In this regard it is important because of the prevailing stereotypes in dominant media news sources that frequently depict poor and urban communities, often of color, as not caring about where they live and mistreating their environment. In a 2013 edition of *The Atlantic* magazine, Ta-Nehisi Coates tackled the history of public policy and the creation of the inner city “ghetto” (Coates, 2013). He quoted Beryl Satter’s book *Family Properties* (1998) citing that the Federal Housing Authority encouraged activities such as redlining and blockbusting whereby real estate agents and developers encouraged white property owners to sell their houses at a loss, by implying that racial minorities were moving into their racially segregated neighborhoods, thus depressing property values. As Coates writes, “The FHA did not simply recommend the use of restrictive covenants, but often insisted upon them as a condition for granting mortgage insurance . . . the FHA effectively standardised and nationalised the hostile, but locally variable racial biases of the private housing industry” (Coates, 2013).

My gesture with PERCENT FOR GREEN is to provide a model of work that de-emphasizes hierarchy and instead encourages agency, identity, and inclusion through the project’s group activities and creative experiences. These matters are relevant because of the troubling history that has taken place. The project’s desired impact is to discuss the effects that further greening of the city and climate change will have on poor communities, if class and race continue to determine the funding of sustainable resources. It would also invite a much needed and poignant dialogue on how to achieve former Mayor Bloomberg’s goal to green New York by 2030 without alienating residents economically and racially. The resources and means exist. From the point of view of many residents

living in marginalized areas, heavy economic pressure, rising costs of living, and a lack of applicable sustainable practices and information that relates to them make climate change other people's problem and a concern of the well-off.

Traditionally, the economy has been supported by commodity production. Yet there exists an undervalued production people's experiences. As participants began to disclose stories and information in workshops and roundtables, they began to uncover their personal experiences of living in a particular place. This is not to say that the arts and artists have all the answers to society's problems. In fact due to the market, the history of patronage, and the cost of getting a fine arts education, most artists come from privileged backgrounds, which removes them, in some instances, from the position of the oppressed. Yet, for those who devote time and consciousness, SPA work focuses on the ways that communities can reclaim space through creativity and willingness to "learn all this without losing sight of the ultimate aim: to know oneself better through others and to know others better through oneself" (Gramsci, 1916, p. 59).

As I explore the artist's role in community through SPA, I want to address notions raised by Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells* (2012) and often brought up in regards to the aesthetic glue of the process of SPA versus object. Bishop questions whether the artist's process and ideology are enough to meet the needs of producing an art object and if they are enough to enact social change (Bishop, 2012). PERCENT FOR GREEN reflects my ongoing investigation of social activism through art as I create situations related to specific challenges in order to transform how community and history are experienced and then use my position as an artist to chronicle and witness. What my role is as an artist in the community, and how art can actively serve a community are questions I have been exploring. For me, the role of education in SPA is to provide an understanding of intention and the impact of life experiences as well as their potential to fill in the gaps in history. Much like oral traditions and storytelling, SPA offers a key to alleviate the disconnect between lived and recorded experiences that can offer insight into modern behavior. It's role, I believe, is to support communities in their intuitive analysis and to identify the ways those outcomes will enhance progress.

Society is in the midst of a monumental transformation that is highlighted by persistent economic, educational, and justice inequities. Helping people to develop trust in their own innate awareness of identity and environment can serve as a conduit for positive transformation.

Progress is caught at a standstill, affected by conservative politics and its fear of losing tradition. In my opinion, SPA is able to address the need for introspection because of its fundamental discourse and purpose, which is to ask its practitioners and audiences to closely reconsider the facets that make up life space, consciousness, and community.

APPENDIX: PERCENT FOR GREEN

A Local Law

Modeled after a Percent for Art passed in 1980 by Mayor Ed Koch, a PERCENT FOR GREEN would allot 1% of the budget for eligible city-funded construction projects be spent on expanding green space and sustainable initiatives in communities in the Bronx and New York City.

Contact: Alicia Grullon becomingmyth@gmail.com; www.aliciagrullon.com

- a. An amount not less than 1% of city-funded construction budgets for commercial developments exceeding \$20 million and large-scale residential developments exceeding \$20 million will be allocated to fund green space (e.g., community gardens, urban farms, public river access, green roofs) and/or sustainable initiatives and activities enhancing community living (e.g., farmer's markets, climate change educational programs, public rain water harvesting, watershed or infrastructure system construction, enhanced community amenity for renewable energy installation, improvement in community aesthetics with plantings and streetscapes) in communities in New York City starting with areas in most need such as underserved areas and Environmental Justice communities.
- b. Green space will also be provided for each capital project which involves the construction or the substantial reconstruction of a city-owned public building or structure which requires that it be accessible to the public or to members of the public participating in, requiring or receiving programs, services, or benefits provided there.
- c. The amount funded will reflect inflation and in no case exceed the expenditure of more than 15% of a new developments' budget.
- d. Underserved and Environmental Justice communities will be defined as locations that suffer from a high number of asthma rates; little or insufficient green space access; located near expressways and interstate highways; suffer from a high level of contamination rendering current green space unusable or uninhabitable;

be vulnerable to climate change conditions such as flooding; suffer from poor storm water drainage and sewage processing; have a high percentage of residents living at or below the poverty line, are elderly, and/or undergoing expansive redevelopment of commercial space.

- e. Reasonable advance notification of the intention to fund green space and/or sustainable initiatives will be provided to the appropriate district council member, council-members-at-large, borough president, chairperson of the community board to the district in which the funding is located. All funding will be fully disclosed to members of the community including neighborhood associations and community groups in public locations such as libraries, schools, local newspapers, US post offices, and via mail in letters directly sent to residents by the community board to the district and/or the appropriate district council member.
- f. Funds will undergo distribution through participatory budgeting in the community receiving PERCENT FOR GREEN funding. Residents via their community boards and local grassroots organizations may submit an application at any time. A review committee will evaluate applications and make recommendations to local officials.

This bill is part of a social practice project PERCENT FOR GREEN by artist Alicia Grullón. It deals with looking at climate change in the Bronx and how art can serve community. The goal is to pass a bill allotting funds from city-funded construction projects to sustainable green initiatives overseen by small grassroots organizations in Environmental Justice (EJ) communities. PERCENT FOR GREEN has consisted of roundtables, workshops, and planning with Bronx-based grassroots organizations for the People's Climate March.

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Alicia Grullón is an interdisciplinary artist who moves between performance, video, and photography. She received a BFA from New York University and an MFA from the State University of New York at New Paltz. Grullón’s works have been shown in group exhibitions including Franklin Furnace, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, BRIC House for Arts and Media, School of Visual Arts, El Museo del Barrio, and Performa 11.

PART IV

Museums and Institutional Responses

Artists on the Gallery Payroll: A Case Study and a Corporate Turn

Lawrence Bradby and Judith Stewart

Abstract Many arts organisations rely on freelance artists to act as their public face: to deliver their education programme, to devise and manage community projects and to demonstrate to people how art can be relevant to their lives. While this type of involvement in the arts might be beneficial for the participants, what does it do for the artists involved?

This chapter uses a conversational format to compare lessons learnt by the authors whilst working for different UK galleries. The authors' experience of Firstsite is particularly relevant. At Firstsite, Stewart developed strategies to support artists' critical practice, whilst Bradby helped non-artists to stage projects inside and outside the gallery. Employed as an 'Associate Artist', Bradby's stable long-term position within the organisation offers a comparison with the other more ephemeral roles that artists take up on behalf of galleries.

Keywords Firstsite · Associate Artist · Artist support · Participatory practice · Socially-engaged practice · Critical dialogue · Employment practice · Freelance

L. Bradby (✉) · J. Stewart
Independent artist, Norwich, UK
e-mail: lawrence.bradby@gmail.com; jastew@dircon.co.uk

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value
and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_8

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INTRODUCTION

Amidst the plaudits regularly heard about the social value of the arts, there is little consideration of the conditions under which this creative output is produced. Discussions of the social value of participatory projects are usually restricted to the impact on participants, whilst discussions of artistic value tend to centre on ethical standards or (lack of) aesthetic quality. However, an examination of the ways in which galleries work with artists not only provides us with another way of understanding some of the problems associated with participatory practices but also reveals the value systems underpinning art galleries and funding bodies. In this chapter we draw on our separate and shared experiences of working with galleries to discuss some of these issues, in particular our experiences of the Associate Artist Scheme at Firstsite, a contemporary visual art gallery in the East of England.

Originally based in the Minories, a historic building on Colchester High Street, Firstsite had an established reputation for its inclusive approach to contemporary art. As the government embarked on its programme of using the arts for economic regeneration, Firstsite joined the list of UK galleries to be expanded, thereby becoming the major venue for contemporary art in the Eastern region. Like others in this programme, the enterprise was characterised by the appointment of an internationally known architect to create an iconic building, and by considerable local opposition to the project. Battling this and construction difficulties, the gallery at last opened in its new home in September 2011. The start of the Associate Artist scheme coincided with this reopening. The Associate Artists were to be line managed by Firstsite's Head of Learning and would help to 'plan, support and deliver the Learning programme' (Firstsite, 2013). By making the posts part time, and by employing 'practicing professional artists who have experience of working with diverse audience groups', the idea was to enable a continuation of each artist's practice, concurrently with their role as Associate Artist (Firstsite, 2013).

Both authors of this chapter worked at Firstsite in this transitional period. During this time we had a series of discussions about the challenges the organisation was facing. In keeping with the way these discussions evolved, we have continued the conversational format here.

'It was horrible ...'

Judith Stewart (JS): When we began these conversations I had been working at Firstsite for about a year developing their Artists' Support Programme. The organisation was in limbo at that time because of the delay to the new building and was operating out of a shop in the town centre. It still managed to put on some interesting projects though, and I felt enthusiastic about the future because of the vision that Katherine Wood, the Director had for the organisation. She, and the staff, had this sense of purpose and were committed not only to supporting the development of artists' practice, but were promoting and taking seriously what were then termed 'socially-engaged' practices. Part of her vision was that exhibitions, learning and artist project spaces would be synthesised: all equally visible and valued. It seemed to me that a major organisation was actually developing the sort of programme I had tried to implement when I was curating in the much smaller Hastings Gallery.

Lawrence Bradby (LB): What sort of programme was that?

JS: This was in 2000 and discussions amongst my artist friends always returned to the lack of opportunities to engage curators in critical dialogue. We were also interested in testing ways to engage non-art audiences and were highly critical of the 'dumbing down' approaches that were becoming *de rigueur* at that time. When I took the job at Hastings, I wanted to see whether it was possible to simultaneously programme critically developed contemporary practices, support local and international artists, *and* address social inclusion.

LB: That's a tall order. Was it possible?

JS: Yes to a point. There were lots of successes but also some serious issues that typified some of the problems you and I are still discussing. What it confirmed is that the general public (whoever they are?) is very open to contemporary art and that the well-intentioned desire of institutions to engage socially-disadvantaged people is marred by attitudes that owe much to Victorian paternalism. I also came to the conclusion that many arts organisations are not very interested in art and actually dislike artists!

LB: Galleries don't dislike artists, but they're confused by them. Galleries struggle with the diversity of practice, and competence, concealed by the term 'artist'. One response is to veer between condescension and fear. Hugh Pilkington has suggested that 'curators are too soft on artists

[because] they're scared of them' (Pilkington, 2007). Another response is to play safe and rely on someone else – another institution – to select artists who are worthy of exhibitions.

JS: When I began my PhD in 2003, my intention was to focus on the relationship between the work and the viewer, but it rapidly became clear that I needed to do something much more fundamental. The research ended up being about the way the social inclusion agenda was affecting artists' work with galleries and their practice. I remember going to a seminar at Robert Gordon University in 2007, where the artist Suzanne Lacy identified two questions that dominate her practice: Who has access to art? and Who makes art? (Lacy, 2007). What she omitted to ask is: Who commissions art? and Who controls the means of distribution? These questions are central to the majority of artists, especially those who consider themselves to be socially-engaged...for want of a better term...

LB: During my time at Firstsite I tried to find an alternative to the term 'socially-engaged'. It seems to me euphemistic and vague. Any art practice emerges from the engagement of the artist in a number of inter-related social sub-worlds, so 'socially-engaged' could apply to Jeff Koons as much as to Suzanne Lacy. 'Socially-engaged art' is frequently used as a synonym for 'art made with people who are socially or economically deprived'. In particular, it's used to label projects aimed at groups of people who, by some metric, are judged to be infrequent visitors to the museum or gallery that is sponsoring the project. In this way 'socially-engaged art' becomes a synonym for 'work with those who lack culture'. The term I propose is a bit flat, but hopefully more honest: 'art made in collaboration with non-artists'.

JS: In 2003 the Arts Council organised the *Interrupt: Artists in Socially-Engaged Practice* symposia to examine issues affecting socially-engaged practices and I was one of the core group of about 30 artists and curators who were asked to participate and respond to all the events. What was noticeable was that, even though we all worked in the same field, we were completely unable to agree on what socially-engaged practices were. In response to this I made a distinction between socially-engaged and participatory practices. What to me marks a difference is that the latter involves members of the public directly in the making whereas the former is essentially the artist engaging *critically* with a social/political context.

LB: Your distinction precludes some of the cultural imperialist associations that put me off the term. But ‘social/political context’ still sounds a bit woolly, as if left-wing sympathies are implied without being stated.

At Firstsite in 2011, the terms being used most often were ‘co-construction’ and ‘collaboration’. There was a clear pedagogic approach centred around learning in the gallery. This involved a hierarchy of approaches, where ‘collaboration’ was better than ‘co-construction’, which was better than ‘construction’, which in turn was better than ‘instruction’. This approach aims to acknowledge the agency of the gallery visitor and to allow them a more equitable relationship with the institution. What’s relevant to our current discussion is that the approach situates the relationship largely in the exchange between two people: gallery educator/artist and member of the public. It doesn’t allow for the relationship between the gallery educator/artist and the gallery itself.

So at these *Interrupt* symposia, what *were* the issues affecting artists that were discussed?

JS: One aspect addressed an issue implied by the term ‘collaboration’ that the work may be co-created but it is the artist who gets the credit and cultural capital. Other issues debated were lack of recognition, lack of visibility, the work not being recognised as art – all things I had come across as both artist and curator. When I started my PhD research, I unearthed one horror story after another. The first two artists interviewed broke down in tears because, they told me, they hadn’t realised how their sense of who they were as artists had been systematically eroded by the organisations with whom they worked. I heard accounts of artists being driven to nervous breakdowns by the difficulties of managing competing or changing priorities; of artists getting into debt because they weren’t paid on time; of artists being parachuted into difficult social situations so that councils and galleries could satisfy funders and the government that they were reaching new audiences (Stewart, 2007).

It also became significant to me that the artist’s voice was, and is still, rarely heard in the fora where policy is made or written about. Susan Jones has also commented on this, noting how artists aren’t ‘invited round the table with curators, directors and consultants’. That we are ‘... at the very end of the food chain’ (Jones, 2013).

LB: That’s the case with the Association of Art Historians (AAH) conference too, which was the precursor to this book. Like you, I earn my living through a combination of freelance work for galleries

and hourly paid lecturing. So unlike gallery employees, arts administrators, or tenured academics, when we attend conferences it's at our own expense. My fee to attend the AAH conference was paid by Firstsite as a leaving present.

JS: In 2007 I went to the *Commonwork* conference on socially-related arts practice in Glasgow and one artist drew attention to this by sitting outside begging so that he could afford the conference fee! Even at the *Interrupt* symposia, most delegates were academics, local authority or Arts Council officers, or were supported by major metropolitan galleries. I came to realise that regional, non-metropolitan organisations just don't matter – that there was an assumption that contemporary art didn't happen outside these centres. But the Arts Council is also culpable in this: I've attended numerous 'consultation' exercises, for example sessions where the Arts Council wanted to develop artist support programmes. ACE draws on the considerable expertise of artists, yet seems to think it shouldn't have to pay them. But I suppose even that is better than their Turning Point¹ programme to determine the future of the Arts in the regions – in the Eastern region no artists have been included at all apart from those representing established spaces.

That was then . . . this is now

JS: Firstsite's Associate Artist Scheme looked like heaven compared to what I had heard about and experienced. It not only tried to address the precarious worker aspect, but also seemed to redress the balance towards artists, treating them as equal partners. Because of my work on Firstsite's Artist Support Programme, I knew that it grew out of a philosophy that exhibition and education programmes were of equal importance and mutually supportive. That was the theory. How did it work in practice?

LB: Prior to joining the scheme I continually teetered on the edge of 'going straight' and getting a full-time job unconnected with the arts. It was amazing to land a job that was part-time, well-paid, and long term. There were six Associate Artists posts. In terms of the scheme in action, we (the six Associate Artists) had two main roles: first, to animate the building and exhibitions within it, and second, to work with groups beyond the building. In the original job description these two roles had equal

importance. In practice, the first of these was often more urgent, and was always more easily understood by the organisational hierarchy.

As animators of the building we led school groups around the exhibitions; we wrote guides to the exhibitions; we designed hands-on resources; we filled up the central multi-use space of the building with friendly and accessible family drop-in sessions. During the delayed construction period, the Firstsite building had become a contested symbol. It stood for wasteful excess or for high-handed cultural imperialism or for cultural regeneration. As ambassadors for the gallery, our role was to soften up these entrenched positions, to make it all seem friendly. We were effectively car sales reps, persuading visitors of the sterling qualities of what was on offer, pointing out the shiny bits, distracting from the problems.

JS: I came across several examples of that in my earlier research and Sonia Boyce has spoken of this in relation to the *Margate Mementos* project we were involved with at Turner Contemporary in 2004. She noted the tendency of galleries to use artists as footsoldiers, getting them to do all sorts of things and then hiding behind the artist when things go wrong (Malik Okon, 2007).

LB: I think galleries get confused about different qualities of engagement. They see any contact with the public as an opportunity to promote their organisation. As Associate Artists we collaborated with non-artists and community groups; some parts of Firstsite saw this as the frontline of the PR battle. Firstsite's reputation was not a primary concern for the people I was collaborating with and I saw no reason to try and change that.

JS: Was this 'footsoldier' role different because you were on the payroll?

LB: Definitely. As an artist, I've never worked for such a long period with the same organisation. The typical freelance rhythm is long periods of waiting, followed by accelerating intensity once the project starts. You've got a builder's mentality: you have to finish the current thing before you can properly start the next project.

JS: But knowing that you had time in one place – albeit on fixed-term contracts – must have created space for something different to happen because you are not responding from *outside* the organisation.

LB: Definitely. We were embedded in the organisation, and unlike freelancers, we had a relatively steady rhythm of work. One example of the

effect this had is the series of performative actions we carried out in front of Firstsite. The new building included a public plaza and in the first few months, the public was working out what it could and should be used for. I made some of those uses visible by asking people to trace someone else's movement across the space, first by watching them move (on foot, on a skateboard, in a pushchair, etc.), marking it on a map, then drawing that line where it happened as a chalk line on the ground. At the end of the day me and Jess White (the other artist involved) used brooms to scrub off the chalk lines and a few of the young people who regularly gathered in front of the gallery asked if they could help.

The next Friday we (me and a different artist, Willow Mitchell) returned with the brooms, this time having added a bike bell to the handle of each broom. We began sweeping, acting in a fashion that was both useful (clearing dead leaves) and performative (we were dressed in sports-wear and were ringing our bells). A different group of young people joined in and started thinking imaginatively about other ways to achieve the task. With the loan of some gaffer tape they fashioned a 'superbroom', which combined all of the available brooms into a single, many-headed, multi-brushed apparatus. They were pleased with their creation and, having designated it an artwork, asked 'Can we put it in the gallery?' I told them that they would have to ask the Senior Curator. They went in to ask her.

JS: And what was her response?

LB: She wasn't there. But that's more of an evasion on my part than an answer. I didn't follow it up. I could have tried to arrange for that discussion – *This is an artwork. No it isn't.* – to take place. But I didn't.

JS: Why not? The Associate Artist Scheme was set up to recognise participatory practice as art and to give it equal status with what went on in the exhibition spaces, but you're hinting that that wasn't your experience and it became clear that the other five Associate Artists also found this. It seems more of a fraught relationship.

LB: 'Fraught' suggests contact and exchange. The relationship with the curatorial team was characterised by indifference. To go back to the brooms, we continued appearing outside the gallery, every Friday afternoon, for another four weeks. Each time we introduced new materials ping pong balls, torches, bean bags and explored the possibilities they offered. When I did try to talk to the Senior Curator about this work, she

referred to a stain on the ground at the front of the building, describing it as 'booze mess', which she went on to explain as the residue of alcohol-induced vomit. In her vision the young people were a source of disorder, a threat to the integrity of artwork and building. She could not see them as creative agents.

JS: There are a number of things to unpick here. One of the soundbites attached to the new building was the idea that it would become 'Colchester's sitting room'. Viñoly's design, with its huge empty spaces that couldn't easily be used for art because of the curved walls, became a haven for young people from the start, as did the canopy at the entrance. They were seen as a problem by many staff at the gallery and various measures were put in place to get rid of them because their presence was seen to conflict with Firstsite's image as a wedding venue and a place for conferences. However, no-one had a problem with middle-aged conference delegates hanging around the entrance smoking... So the same behaviours are acceptable in one social group but not another.

LB: Only some of the staff saw the young people as a problem. And most of the gallery Learning Team worked hard to welcome them. The difference between the conference smokers and the young people is that some of the latter were there regularly every week for months, years. This creates different resonances to their actions.

JS: Another question with the 'superbroom' example seems to be 'What is seen?' In galleries, it's not so much *what happens*, but what is seen as significant: what is made visible and critically evaluated as art? How this is answered clearly depends on who is looking. The Senior Curator *could* have engaged you in a discussion about this performance and its value as art, but chose not to. From the work I was doing with the Associate Artists, I know that you were all critically evaluating what you were doing in terms of art and you yourself made distinctions between some of the activities that took place and 'Art', but it seems as if it was difficult to get *any* of your practice recognised outside of the Learning Team.

LB: Even within the Learning Team there was a hesitancy to embrace this kind of improvised collaborative performance as ART. I'm really lucky I had your encouragement and support to try these things out.

With hindsight, I see I needed to assert that these actions – the sweeping, the interventions into the young people's social space – qualified as art. Although they took place at the contested edges of the gallery, I needed to

bring them inside in some way, to make them unmissable – just as the young people suggested with the superbroom.

We made an effort to do that with *Dog-Jam*, a strand of work lasting for about a year. This was a collaboration with fellow Associate Artist Jevan Watkins Jones and residents of Greenstead, a big council estate. *Dog-Jam* was a way for residents to focus on the quality of green spaces in their area. For the first six months, *Dog-Jam* took place entirely outside the gallery. It culminated in *Dog-Jam: Dog Days*, three days of cultural activities at Firstsite planned by the residents with Jevan and me. For the gallery Director and the Senior Curator these activities were routine fare: film screenings, drawing workshops, family events. For the Learning Team, and for me, the fact these events were programmed and organised by people from outside the organisation made them special. We were using the building as a frame for cultural expression and central to that culture was the human-dog relationship. As it happened, the exhibiting artist, Anthea Hamilton, was visiting at the same time as the *Dog-Jam* event to give a talk. The Senior Curator was nervous about how Hamilton would respond to a public workshop of dog portraiture and she asked me, 'Is that yours, the stuff in the Mosaic Space? Could you move it? The artist's tour is happening today.' This constituted one of only three conversations I had with the Senior Curator about art during my two years at Firstsite.

JS: Do you think there was anything else you could have done to engage her interest? I thought this attitude was something that had been consigned to history – after all, the Educational Turn had been firmly established. There had been several signs early on, including the loss of the proposed Artists' Project Space, that the new Senior Curator had different values – what I regard as a rather old-fashioned approach to exhibition programming. This perception of the Associate Artists' practices as not 'art' or not 'good' art was something I came across repeatedly in my own research and was a frequent theme during the *Interrupt* symposia.

LB: Some of us in the Firstsite Learning Team had a little game. As each new exhibition was announced, we would tick off that artist's name in a copy of the catalogue from *British Art Show 7*. So, how to engage the Senior Curator's interest? Be in the *British Art Show*. Be pre-discovered. Be already judged as worthwhile. Be a safe bet.

Do you know the artist Douglas Huebler? He was interested in framing everyday movements – people playing basketball for example – and presenting them as art. He was careful to rule out any uncertainty by including a

statement as part of the work. For *Variable Piece No.20* (1971), the statement details where (Bradford, Massachusetts) and how (every 30 seconds) the photos were taken and then concludes ‘23 photographs join with this statement to constitute the form of this piece’ (Rorimer, 2001).

Ruth Melville, the outside evaluator for *Dog-Jam* was forceful on this point. She said, ‘you need to be able to tell colleagues why what you’ve done is important’.

JS: But who are your colleagues in this context? Are they *just* the other Associate Artists and the Learning Team or are they the curatorial Programming Team and the whole staff?

LB: Both. And for both these groups, the disbelieving gallery hierarchy *and* the overworked colleagues in the Learning Team, you need to point out exactly what has been framed, and claimed, as art. A third group is equally important: the people outside the art-world who collaborated in the work. They need to see that the work remains true to their ideas.

JS: But why do you need to persuade your colleagues of the value of what you’ve done? Surely, as employees of an art gallery, it’s part of their job to promote your work in the same way that they would if you were exhibiting objects. Participatory art is a well-established form of contemporary practice now and experienced curators ought to recognise this without artists having to point it out: especially as you were obviously good enough to be an Associate *Artist*.

LB: Well, they ought to, but galleries contain multiple ambivalences. A gallery can both argue for ‘art made in collaboration with non-artists’ and, at the same time, resist showing such work.

I can see some of the reasons this situation was maintained at Firstsite. The artists engaged by the curatorial team (what you and I have called ‘exhibiting artists’ to distinguish them from ‘learning artists’ employed by a Learning or Education Department) make their art somewhere else. The curator sees this completed art, chooses it, and brings it back to Firstsite. As Associate Artists, we made the work in, or close to, the Firstsite building. The situations in which we made it – group gatherings, meetings, public events – looked from the outside very like other things we did – schools workshops, family drop-in events – which we didn’t designate as art. For the curatorial team, this combination of physical proximity and procedural uncertainty made it harder to recognise what we were doing.

Another reason of course is the established hierarchy that exists across almost all UK galleries: curatorial trumps education.

JS: What could the Associate Artists do to loosen these hierarchies? We're talking about institutional power here and I wonder to what extent you think it is possible to do this as an artist whilst being on the gallery payroll or employed as a freelancer.

LB: Certainly weren't no loosening on my watch! One way that hierarchy is maintained is by separating out different elements of a particular task, so that one person cannot follow it through. As Associate Artists, we were often putting in requests – Can I use this space? Can I store an artwork here? – and waiting while the Senior Management Team considered them. We weren't able to attend those meetings, argue our case, or hear the reasons for assent or refusal.

JS: What was interesting to me, supporting the development of the research aspects of your roles, was that, without exception, all the Associate Artists *and* the Learning staff recognised and were frustrated by the hierarchy of values operating within the gallery and it became a central issue in everyone's research. It surprised (and depressed) me to find that so little has changed since *Interrupt*. The action research seminars you organised, inviting people working in gallery education in other regions to debate some of the issues, revealed that this is common across *all* galleries, not just Firstsite.

One aspect of this we have discussed previously is your perception that different rules apply for exhibiting artists. The two examples that spring to mind are the photograph from *Dog-Jam* and the payslip you used to publicise your action research seminars.

LB: As part of *Dog-Jam: Dog Days*, Jevan Watkins Jones, me, and some of our collaborators from Greenstead chose a dozen photos documenting the outdoor events. A few days later, the Learning Officer and I were making the final selection before sending the photos to the printer. One photo showed two of the collaborators in the middle of a huge grassy area. They were putting a sign up on a tree and one of them was smoking. The photo captured the expanse and the feel of the council estate and something of the attitudes of our collaborators. It worked in combination with the other photos we had selected, which were mostly close ups. The Learning Officer argued against using this photo, saying that by including smoking it set a bad example.

I failed to win the argument. The exclusion of this photo subtly but fundamentally changed the implication of the installation: it shifted the photographs from documentation of the project to promotion of what it should have looked like. It redefined our roles – Jevan, me, our Greenstead collaborators – from artists and authors of an event, to project workers delivering an institutionally acceptable image.

The payslip was a longer running affair. As you say, I was running some action research seminars. The aim was to discuss how galleries work with artists, and how this relationship is altered when, as in my case, the artists are on the payroll. The title was *Artists On The Gallery Payroll*. To publicise the seminars, I wanted to use a drawing I had done in marker pen. It showed a twisty stunted ash tree growing across my payslip. The Finance Officer objected to making public my monthly income and said it would give people ‘ammunition to criticise the gallery with’. So the first version which went out, without my knowledge, had some crude additions that served to conceal the numbers. I wrote a snotty email and things reached an impasse. After a few weeks I was calmer and so was the Finance Officer. She explained her objections better and I listened better. I re-drew the tree a few times. Eventually a version was accepted that had a hand-drawn version of the payslip, with ‘The Art Gallery’ along the top instead of ‘Firstsite’.

JS: I think what one is ‘allowed’ to do as an artist showing objects in many ways reveals art’s impotence. I’m thinking here of Mark Wallinger’s *State Britain* (2007) which technically broke the law but was ignored by the police, unlike the real protest that was banned. This raises three possibilities: 1) that the different values ascribed to ‘exhibiting’ as opposed to ‘learning’ artists that you’ve described is based on the assumption that the artist working within a learning context is ‘less good’, as artists in my research believed; 2) the work itself is seen as being of less ‘value’ to the organisation because it has a different intended viewer? That is, ‘Joe Public’ rather than ‘JJ Charlesworth’; or 3) rather than maintaining the status quo, interactions between artists and the public run a risk of destabilising the hierarchies that keep people in their place. But perhaps that’s wishful thinking?

LB: The payslip drawing had a potent and unexpected effect inside the Firstsite office. Not sure what it did once it was revealed to the wider public and allowed to circulate more widely. And in fact it’s still on the gallery website.

JS: One thing we haven't yet discussed is the relationship between artists and participants. Again, going back 10 or 15 years, artists talked about the difficulties of being parachuted into communities. One of the benefits of the Associate Artist scheme was it gave you time to build relationships and I'm guessing that knowing you were going to be around for a couple of years rather than a few weeks affected your approach to projects.

LB: Chris Fremantle defines collaboration as something that 'should ideally take the project somewhere else – a place where you didn't expect it to end up, as the input of all the collaborators reshapes the project into something altogether new' (Fremantle, 2012). The timescales that artists on these kinds of projects usually work to – weeks to months – leave insufficient time for the unexpected to surface.

The *Dog-Jam* project emerged from collaboration with a tenants and residents group, Voices4Greenstead. Their initial impulse was to celebrate the green spaces of their estate, but their approach was the conventional schoolkids-make-posters. The extended timescales allowed this idea to change and develop as we talked it over and different people became involved. Other aspects (film cameras mounted on dogs, outdoor drawing classes) developed from the original impulse. In particular, there began to be space for the creativity of the adults as well as for schoolchildren.

JS: In my follow-up research on the *Margate Mementos* project, the participants stressed that personal contact with the artists had been the crucial factor in their decision to get involved. I got the impression that whilst they felt valued by the artists, they were suspicious of the gallery's motives.

In a way this was exemplified in our differing opinions about what constituted a 'participant'. Erika Tan got into trouble with Turner Contemporary because she proposed giving a donation, out of her fee and materials budget, to the coastguard participants who were enabling her to make the work. The gallery argued that if they were paid they could not be counted as 'participants' and, what's more, it might set a precedent that would encourage other, otherwise 'proper' participants to ask for payment. But for the artist, this is an important ethical point because the work cannot be made without the participants.

Extending this argument we should also stress that arts organisations, curators, directors and critics cannot exist without artists, yet outside of a few 'stars', the majority are consigned to what Gregory

Sholette has called ‘Dark Matter’ (Sholette, 2011). Unless we are one of these stars or have an increasingly scarce tenured teaching position, most artists have become the ideal neo-liberal employee. We accept zero-hours contracts, with no pensions, no sick pay, no holidays, because the mythology surrounding the ‘individual’ artist means that there are always others who will step in. Although many, including Jacques Rancière (2006), have drawn attention to this, I find it interesting that we continue to accept – and are grateful for – working conditions that we condemn when we see them in other fields.

The Firstsite scheme clearly was trying to address some of this. What was the significance of being salaried for you and what how did it differ from being freelance?

LB: The difference is like going from close-up to wide-angle. As a freelancer you work on a particular project – the area has been designated before you began, the project parameters – and you interact with the rest of the gallery only if it serves your particular ends. As a salaried artist, I was witness to, and implicated in, all of the ways that galleries repeatedly assert what is meaningful and what is not, what is acceptable and what is inappropriate. As an artist I began to see opportunities to use these gallery routines as the site for small works and interventions. Like wanting to draw on my payslip.

I want to loop back to our discussion of what one is allowed to do as an ‘exhibiting artist’ and a ‘learning artist’. Perversely, the situation of receiving a regular salary made us *less* like artists for parts of Firstsite. Artists are people who come in for brief periods, work hard, ask for lots of help, and then leave. We were too familiar to be artists. And our un-artistic situation altered the way gallery colleagues responded to our requests.

JS: Looking at the selection criteria, the decision to make the posts 0.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) rather than full-time was because you were expected to have a practice outside of your work at Firstsite. This parallel practice has clear advantages for the gallery as it increases your individual expertise, but is not recognised in your salary. This fits neither the model of ‘normal’ tenured contracts (where what you do outside your contracted hours is not your employer’s business) nor the fees paid to consultants, where high daily rates supposedly reflect the consultant’s experience of working in other contexts.

LB: It's a conundrum. You need to maintain an on-going practice to qualify for the role, but as soon as you exercise that practice at work, by making art and by making it public, you compromise your position and become an irritant. What about the analogy of a hacker employed by the government to advise on cyber-security? They need to know about the latest scams but they better not be trying them out at work.

JS: Publicly funded galleries seem keen to show that they are populated by artists: staffed by them, influenced by them, that they value artists, that the gallery is synonymous with artists. I think this is a façade. For galleries, art is their 'business'. Talking about 'our' artists is a commercial model. There are two missions here, both of them financially driven: first, projects with people who draw in public funding (the socially-disadvantaged, those who don't normally go to contemporary art galleries, or those who belong to groups with current cultural resonance like wounded soldiers); second, exhibitions of work by 'validated' artists to draw in sponsorship and cultural kudos.

Building so many new galleries has made this more obvious because of the running costs involved. At Firstsite, fear of financial failure put huge pressure on the exhibition programme. It had to be seen to be hugely successful, as any loss of cultural kudos would damage potential income. Commercial interests affected the whole building. We've already discussed this in relation to the young people, but 'art' was regularly booted out of the learning rooms and public spaces to make way for money-making schemes. A prime example of this was when we were turned out during one of your seminars to allow staff to prepare for a wedding. We've seen these financial pressures affecting galleries across the UK with their perceived need for branding and corporate identity. Having had the Educational Turn and the Curatorial Turn, we are now firmly in the grip of the Corporate Turn.

LB: Can I squeeze in this anecdote? It is painfully apposite. So, it's Spring 2012. Jevan Watkins Jones is running a series of public drawing workshops that link biological and architectural form. The workshops are in the printed brochure, on the website: full disclosure. Jevan is planning to draw the profuse white spring growth – cow parsley, ox-eye daisy, campion – that is pushing up in the carefully sculpted arc of long grass along the edge of the gallery. At the office photocopier, Jevan overhears the Commercial Director of the gallery saying, 'Can we get that neatened up before Saturday?' Jevan interjects, saying he

was planning to use the plants as part of his workshop. The Commercial Director laughs: ‘we’ve got a wedding, you know’. The long grass is duly strimmed and Jevan has to quickly alter his plans. Nothing disappoints a spring wedding party like a profusion of white wildflowers.

JS: This is another example of the different value ascribed to people as well as to art. Commercial trumps participation. And it’s also clear that some visitors are ‘worth’ more than others in terms of the cultural capital they bring to the gallery.

LB: That’s epitomised by the practice of subsidising coaches to run from East London to openings at publicly-funded provincial galleries. The idea is to bring an audience of cognoscenti to bless the work. It’s an established cultural tradition – Firstsite did it so did Wysing, others too, I’m sure. The effect is to give a clear indication of who the exhibition’s really meant for.

It’s that glance over the shoulder, that nervous checking back to the mother country that makes me see Firstsite as a wooden stockade somewhere on the Eastern Seaboard of North America. An outpost for cultural imperialism.

Postscript

As a postscript to the previous conversation, which took place in 2014, several things have changed. On a personal level, neither of us works with Firstsite and we are still precarious workers. Firstsite’s financial and other difficulties led to the Arts Council England assuming control of the organisation in December 2014. Following the model used in the education sector, an interim director from another organisation was appointed.

The entire Curatorial Programming Team, most of the Learning Team, and all of the gallery assistants (all artists) have lost their jobs. In December 2015, the words ‘art’ and ‘artist’ were conspicuously absent from the new posts created, presumably to replace those lost. Instead, this former flagship contemporary visual art venue seeks applicants with experience as *‘Customer Services Manager, Front of House, Customer Service, Hospitality Manager, Visitor Attraction, Guest Relations Manager, Hospitality, Senior Customer Service Representative, Visitor Services Manager, Team Leader, Supervisor, Volunteer Management etc. pacify and allay’*.

NOTE

1. Turning Point, published in 2006, was Arts Council England's 10-year strategy for the arts.

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Lawrence Bradby is part of the collaborative practice Townley and Bradby. Townley and Bradby investigates the family as a site for creative practice, and has recently launched a quarterly publication *Brood*, to look at art and parenting in the current context of a government determined to reduce and out-source public services.

Dr. Judith Stewart is an artist, writer, and curator with an interest in the relationship between culture and politics. She teaches MA and BA Fine Art at Norwich University of the Arts, UK, where she is also a research degree supervisor and a member of the Created and Contested Territories Research Group.

Collecting Social Things

Joey Orr

Abstract How might collections preserve and reflect what is on offer by way of social practice, which includes, among other things, interactive installations, architectural propositions, public actions, community organising, the preparation and serving of food, and even policy reform? Do we collect documentation meant to evoke a past instance of socially created meaning, or something symbolic meant to communicate a poetics of a former work around a particular issue? What is the “object,” so to speak, of social engagement? What is the thing that is being collected, presented, or interpreted exactly? Things associated with social practice are entering major museum collections, at any rate, so how might these collection practices reflect this unwieldy field?

Keywords Social practice · Socially engaged art · Public practice · Museum studies · Contemporary art

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reflects on the challenges of collecting socially engaged art. If collecting institutions are charged with preserving works of art for future generations that construct or challenge formal, social, or political

J. Orr (✉)

Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA
e-mail: joeyorr13@gmail.com

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_9

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perspectives, social practice meets all of these criteria. But if social practice makes a contribution to the consideration of contemporary artistic forms, how might collections preserve and reflect what is on offer by way of these practices, which include, among other things, interactive installations, architectural propositions, public actions, community organising, the preparation and serving of food, and even policy reform? Do we collect documentation meant to evoke a past instance of socially created meaning, or something symbolic meant to communicate a poetics of a former work around a particular issue? These suggestions are not unlike the work of history or civil rights museums, and if art is trafficking with life and politics, our methods of display may at times look more like ethnographic *mis-en-scène* rather than white cubes. Social practice is generally collected now in support of an institution's larger collection goals and strengths. But can we imagine curatorial departments considering the social as its own formal category, like painting or sculpture, or as a time-based medium, for example? If social practice has a place in the histories and discourses our public institutions are accumulating, how does the social enter a collection? What is the "object," so to speak, of social engagement? What is the thing that is being collected, presented, or interpreted exactly? It cannot be the social relation itself. One cannot objectively collect and preserve a social relation since it is co-generated by contingencies in a present moment.

This is not meant to be reductive. There are plenty of examples of work for which the only material traces are instructions or certificates of authenticity, so the collection of radically de-materialised works of art are not new in the least. At the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago where I am researching at this writing, the collection includes such de-materialised works as wall drawings and paintings by Lothar Baumgarten and Sol Lewitt, which exist as sets of instructions often requiring a trained individual to be employed for the work's realisation. Other examples include a diminishing stack of endless paper by Félix González-Torres specially printed in advance of each showing, or the recent acquisition of Pierre Huyghe's *Name Announcer* (2011), in which someone asks museum visitors their names and formally announces them to the gallery as they enter. For Tino Sehgal's *Kiss* (2002), a dance performance that takes place in the gallery, the work may not even be imaged or labelled with interpretive material, which gives viewers no real information or indication of what is happening around them. Even the contract itself is a verbal agreement, leaving little more than hard copies of email exchanges in the

collection file. Together, these practices are understood in the contexts of installations, conceptual works, post-minimal strategies, and performance. All share challenges with collecting and preserving social practice. They are not, however, exactly the same.

One challenge of collecting social practice is that it can be tied to institutional critique. Of course many collections include examples of art-works invested in institutional critique, most famously perhaps Hans Haacke's *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971), which was censored from its first exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, but has subsequently been purchased jointly by the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani (Foundation Museum of Contemporary Art) in Barcelona. Although this work issued clear and effective social and political challenges to the institution, it consists of photostats, gelatin silver prints, and photocopies, so *materially* it is not a challenge to collect and exhibit. Some artists, however, produce work in de-materialised forms precisely to avoid their easy commodification, and collections certainly traffic in a system of commodity exchange. Because social practice can be tied to politics that mean to challenge global and colonial economic systems that reproduce violence, isolation, and cultural domination rather than social connection, an attitude of ambivalence about the commodity phase of a work from its very cultural producers is not uncommon. In fact, there are many reasons for practitioners to disassociate social practice from art, including an investment in more democratic forms, or even making such practices available to other, non-art-based disciplines. Even so, it may still be the institution's job to trace this move of resistance and critique. If social practice disassociates itself from art, this is part of the story of art's history and produces a potentially productive challenge for public, collecting institutions. How might we preserve something that communicates the historically embedded concern with social relation and its growing discomfort with the category of art? Things associated with social practice are entering major museum collections, at any rate, so how might these collection practices traffic with this unwieldy field?

Francis Alÿs's mass public action, *When Faith Moves Mountains* (Lima, Peru, 2002), in which 500 volunteers collectively moved a sand dune several inches with shovels, provides a useful proposition towards the immaterial that intentionally leaves no trace. The connection between this action and the subsequent exhibition of its documentation is not merely archival. Alÿs states: "Only in its repetition and transmission is

the work actualised” (Aljõs and Anton, 2002). It is the artist’s own suggestion, then, that this one-time event is not marked as lost or inaccessible, like too often overly romanticised moments of early performance and body art. Rather, its very activation depends on its recapitulation for future publics. There is no consensus on this or many other questions surrounding social practice, nor perhaps should there be. The following case studies, however, illustrate some artistic and institutional challenges in the collection of social form.

CASE STUDIES

In 2007, the Bronze Soldier statue was moved from Tõnismäe, a central point in the city of Tallin in Estonia, to a cemetery in a more remote location. For a minority Russian population, this monument memorialised Russia’s victory over Nazism, while for a majority it was a dark reminder of Russian occupation. The memorial, therefore, had been an ongoing point of contention. The relocation was met with rioting, but the statue was never returned. Artist Kristina Norman made miniatures of the Bronze Soldier and distributed them at the new location to Russians visiting the memorial. Someone eventually took one of the miniatures to the original site and lit a candle in reference to an eternal flame. People brought flowers, and it received news coverage. Norman describes: “The meaningful void of the monument’s previous location was filled by the miniature copy of the symbol that had previously been standing there” (Norman, 2009). In 2009, Norman installed a golden, paper-maché replica of the soldier, this time to scale, on the monument’s original site on the day Russians celebrate their victory during World War II. The work activated an unresolved issue between populations with conflicting connections to history. The sculpture and video documentation of the conflict and public action became the art installation, *After-War*, and represented Estonia in the 2009 Venice Biennale.

The Kumu Art Museum in Talin generally tries to acquire works that represent Estonia in the biennale. They did not, however, acquire *After-War*. This may be because the work generated negative responses, because it was generally seen as a political provocation as opposed to art, because Norman was already sufficiently represented in the collection, or any combination of these (Norman, 2014). In any case, Estonia’s contribution to the 2009 biennale was acquired by the Museum of Contemporary Art

Kiasma in Helsinki, Finland. Although Kiasma mostly collects Finnish contemporary art, works from Russia and Nordic and other Baltic countries at times fall within the purview of the collection, according to Pirkko Siitari who was chief curator at Kiasma during the acquisition of the work and just beginning her five-year term as director when it was originally installed. She states: “Finland and Estonia have a close relationship, and the relation to Russia is [an] important issue for both countries. But for Estonia, it’s much more complicated as they were occupied so many years and the independency status of Russian speaking people was under discussion” (Siitari, 2015). The work’s politics informed its collection in implicit and explicit ways.

Curator Mark Nash has stated that what *After-War* offers more typical Estonian and Baltic narratives is the topic of reconciliation (Nash, 2009). As someone with both Russian and Estonian identifications, Norman is acutely attuned to the personal and political effects of the incommensurable occupying the same space. Nash’s emphasis is that Norman acknowledges the Russian-speaking Estonian community as also having rights towards memorialisations of the past without negating Estonian post-independence (Nash, 2009). We can actually read those present for Norman’s memorial not as two separate feuding memory collectives, but instead as their own form of collectivity, however vexed. In a 2008 address given at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, visual culture scholar Irit Rogoff offers:

To speak of collectivities is to de-nativise community, to argue it away from the numerous essential roots of place and race and kinship structures that have for so long been the glue that has held it together. Equally to speak of mutualities is to think against the grain of ideological mobilizations that are grounded in the pursuit of an end, of a conclusion, of a resolution. (Rogoff, 2008)

If we follow Rogoff, then, Norman’s replica of the Bronze Soldier stages a space around which collectivity is being achieved through an instance of political conflict. The collectivity generated by *After-War* was actively non-prescriptive. Although troubled, the mutuality surrounds an unresolved moment of representation and reinstates neither race nor kinship in any resolved manner, reflecting the complexity inherent to any group identification.

The collection exhibit, *It’s a Set-Up* (2010), at Kiasma in which *After-War* was exhibited sought to examine, among other things, the work of art

as its own kind of event. And by way of the title, it begs reflection on the reality and malleability of the event, as well as the porous boundary between life event and art event. Curator Saara Hacklin states that Norman's piece gave the exhibition a political angle. She describes the work as including "performative, participatory elements, blurring the line between art and life" (Hacklin, 2015). Similarly, Siitari describes *After-War* as simultaneously presenting "the real" and Norman's action by way of video documentation, drawings, and sculpture. She claims: "Kristina transformed the art action into the object of art" (Siitari, 2015). In other words, events surrounding the conflicted reception of the Bronze Soldier were transformed into a public art event and then documented and reconfigured for exhibition. Interestingly, the artist claims it was its institutional collection that legitimated *After-War* as a work of art (Norman, 2014). Although Siitari acknowledges the work's many different political and public contexts, she also adds: "the art institution itself is also a political public sphere" (Siitari, 2015). The object's drift through various public, artistic, and institutional contexts inevitably impacts its status and receptions. The public event was interpreted by video and sculptural installation to communicate this situated struggle to future audiences. And for the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, this was considered within the scope of their collection.

From 1985 to 1987, California-based artist Suzanne Lacy initiated the Whisper Minnesota Project. This work addressed cultural perceptions of ageing women and explored their representations in public opinion and the media. It was a conceptual and performative platform that encompassed events, classes, film screenings, a media campaign, and a leadership series, among many other activities.¹ The work culminated in the one day performance, *The Crystal Quilt*, in which 430 women over the age of 60 discussed their views on ageing. The performance, a visual spectacle that activated a design by painter Miriam Schapiro and included collaboration with many other artists, was attended by over 3,000 people. In 2012, the Tate (London, England) acquired the work in the form of video, documentary, quilt, photos, a sound piece by Susan Stone, and a time-lapse film (Lacy, 2015). The title of the work collected by the Tate is *The Crystal Quilt*, the title of the one-hour performance; however, its dates correspond to the two-and-a-half-year Whisper Minnesota Project (1985–1987). According to Lacy: "Whisper Minnesota Project was a process of complex organizing. *Crystal Quilt* was quite visually and theatrically spectacular. So the project collapses into the performance as the story is told later" (Lacy, 2015).

There are many nuances that get washed over in the representation of such work. For Lacy, how one captures working with city council, on the one hand, and theoretical work on de-colonisation, on the other, illustrates the breadth of activity encompassed by her practice (Lacy, 2015). How is political activism and policy reform represented when collecting social practice? Lacy's work with youth in the Oakland Projects and its associated installations and performances share some of these challenges. She explains: "People tend to see my works like The Oakland Projects as simpler to achieve than they actually are. To have a hundred police officers and a hundred and fifty teenagers talking to each other on top of a roof...that reads as a very dramatic performative event, but it says nothing about two and a half years of organizing and attempts at institutional reform and at policy change" (Lacy, 2015). And some of this has to do with the ongoing struggle to understand something like policy reform as art practice. This becomes a question then of how and in what manner activism may be taken as art. It is one thing to theorise this connection. It is another to take seriously the possibility of institutionally preserving it as one preserves other things more commonly categorised as art—namely, objects. But who determines these borders and by what method or (inter)disciplinary authority? Lacy explains that critic Grant Kester, for example, will follow a two-and-half-year project, while other critics simply will not. She continues:

[Nicolas] Bourriaud looks out into the world of the gallery and sees social practice artists, so you won't hear anything about Rick Lowe [Project Rowe Houses] in Bourriaud's writing. What I think is interesting is how ideas of social practice emerge from a variety of positions. But they deeply complicate the art making we are used to, and I think they'll exist long after the art world has decided not to collect them (Lacy, 2015).

How these boundaries are drawn is not unrelated to the work of Lacy's long-time friend, Allan Kaprow, whose practice staked its claim on the very borders between art and life.

Although there are examples of social practice in collections, it is in no way clear that they are actually collectible in any real or effective sense. Performance art faces similar challenges. Lacy sees the rise of younger artists, such as Jeremy Deller and Tino Sehgal, as coincident with the appearance of social practice in the gallery, so that the issue of representing the social was an active strategy from the beginning. Both artists have managed to maintain a relatively immaterial practice and simultaneously be collected by institutions.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, for example, owns works by each. For Deller, the work *It Is What It Is* references what most people will remember as a road trip organised with Creative Time (New York) in which Deller, curator Nato Thompson, Iraqi artist Esam Pasha, and U.S. Sergeant Jonathan Harvey travelled across the USA with a prompt to spark conversation about Iraq: the remains of a car that had been destroyed in a bombing on Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad in 2007. What persists in the MCA Chicago collection, however, is a banner made by Ed Hall, who makes banners for British trade unions and has worked with Deller on many projects. This cotton banner, on which *It Is What It Is* appears in both English and Arabic, and a “constructed situation” are owned together by a museum consortium consisting of MCA Chicago, the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), and the New Museum (New York). Laura Hoptman, currently Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art (NY), was at the New Museum at the time the piece was commissioned. She explains:

It Is What it Is: Conversations About Iraq was both site specific to the U.S., and time specific- during wartime. In another country at a time when there is no war between the U.S. and Iraq, there would be no reason to recreate the conversations. The banner and the idea of the situation then, are souvenirs, or artifacts that commemorate the exhibition, which cannot be recapitulated. This is similar to the objects by Paul Chan- props from his staging of *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans- that MoMA owns. We own these artifacts and show them as the remains of what was a theatrical performance that happened and was done. We don’t have any intention of restaging *Waiting for Godot*. (Hoptman, 2015)

For Hoptman, then, there is no life beyond the project, other than archival remains. Curator Amy Mackie who also worked on the commission echoes this sentiment. She claims: “To me, the banner, I hate to say it, it’s not meaningless, but it’s just really more of a prompt, a prop. It is. It was always about the people” (Mackie, 2015). Deller’s 2001 reenactment of a 1984 miners’ strike, *The Battle of Orgreave*, is represented in the Tate’s collection and titled *The Battle of Orgreave Archive (An Injury to One is an Injury to All)*. It is named an archive in the title of the work, but described as an installation artwork in their permanent collection. Lacy describes: “Tino Sehgal sells an instruction, he’s coming from the perspective of performance, not social practice. When Jeremy Deller does a performance in the field and sells the documentation to a museum, he’s

coming from social practice” (Lacy, 2015). For Lacy, however, what is pivotal to their status as art is their association with performance.

But there are examples of older contemporary artists like Christo and the late Jeanne-Claude, who considered public processes part of their work, but were simultaneously quite adept at producing sellable, collectible works in support of large-scale, site-specific installations. Lacy points out that Christo began as a painter, whereas she has arrived at the issue of collection much later in her career. She explains:

The question for me in all of this is how do you represent the complexity of the work and then do you distribute pieces, or editions of it, as collectible objects, which I’m really not interested in doing. Or do you thoughtfully reconstruct the work as a display for another type of venue, like a museum, in such a manner that it will be a stand in for the actual work? (Lacy, 2015)

When Lacy considers the collection of one of her social practice pieces, there is further work that has to be generated by her so that the process is adequately represented. That is, the collection of past, immaterial processes requires the composition of new work for its future representations. This may be because the original work was geared towards political activism or media interventions, whereas the subsequent work is generated more specifically as a form of representation.

Although the Tate’s collection committee may have struggled over the status of *The Crystal Quilt* as art object or archival document, in the end the piece entered their permanent collection as a work of art. This is not to say, however, that the Tate has necessarily given any special consideration to the collection of social practice. After all, *The Crystal Quilt* is really a performance piece with social implications. In fact, Lacy claims: “It was difficult to produce authentic social practice within the museum regulations” (Lacy, 2015). It is not until the title of the performance is associated with the dates of the social project that the limits get confused and the possibilities for claiming what is being institutionally signalled as the thing being preserved begin to expand. And in its current form at this writing, Lacy believes the work is still not, yet, adequately represented, but she has a specific addition in mind. This consists of two large, table-sized drawings and a bird’s eye view video of two different groups diagramming the process of organising the project, documenting activities such as recruitment, fundraising, and public relations. Lacy states: “So in the case of *The Crystal Quilt*, I think that’s probably what’s going to complete it for me” (Lacy, 2015).

CONTEXTS AND SUGGESTIONS

The obvious challenge in collecting socially engaged art is that the artistic medium is a social form. Although social projects often engage physical objects, physical objects are not an equivalency for socially engaged art. In a very real, logistical sense, objects do not do the same work as social practice. As Hoptman points out, neither Deller's *It Is What It Is* banner, nor props from Paul Chan's *Waiting for Godot* actually make these two instances of social practice present in the galleries because they were socially constructed in specific historical and political contexts. But when the object no longer delivers its expected function, other possibilities may present themselves. In his essay, "Thing Theory," Bill Brown suggests: "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us" (Brown, 2001, p. 4). When the object that is collected cannot speak the entirety of Lacy's theoretical and policy work, for example, or the full spectrum of Deller's practice, we might re-examine our relation to things, rather than toss them off as mere objects with limited capacity. Where there is trouble, there is always the potential for epistemological yield.

In speaking to the potency of Norman's *After-War*, curator Saara Hacklin has stated: "As for *After-War*, I think in the exhibition context it was interesting to think [about] the 'participatory' nature of the original Bronze Soldier: how people had 'used' a work of art for expressing their national identity and how the statue had such a loaded symbolism in it" (Hacklin, 2015). In other words, the meaning generated by this series of events, that became an art action, and an eventual video and sculptural installation, had its genesis in the relation of the public to an object—"the 'participatory' nature of the original Bronze Soldier" (Hacklin, 2015). I would like to suggest here, perhaps counterintuitively, that the collection of social practice may find one of its most productive theoretical contexts in a new materialist framework. In this particular example, I want to evoke Robin Bernstein's idea of the "scriptive thing." She states: "A thing demands that people confront it on its own terms; thus, a thing forces a person into an awareness of the self in material relation to the thing" (Bernstein, 2009, p. 69). This seems a particularly productive context for the Bronze Soldier's role in Norman's *After-War*. Since a thing is not a mere object of use, but can instead trigger all manner of relations, the thing that conjures a subject-object relation may in fact be the most suitable stand in for the representation of social practice in an institutional context.

Jeremy Deller's piece, *It Is What It Is*, has been collected as a constructed situation and cotton banner. But if we follow Hoptman, constructing the

conversation in a different time and place may have little of the initial work's meaning. But perhaps its future exhibitions do not intend to produce the same piece exactly. In defining the scriptive thing, Bernstein describes: "[it] broadly structures a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable" (Bernstein, 2009, p. 69). This proposition opens the social thing to future uses that seem radically open in both curatorial and artistic contexts. A thing does not stay in its commodity status forever.² Further, things often have longer, more interesting lives than we do. That is why we study ourselves in relation to them and mark our immaterial connections in material ways. The social thing may evoke a relation to social practice through the object's very failure. And this can be a generative site.

The case studies of collected social practice discussed here were works by Kristina Norman, Suzanne Lacy, and Jeremy Deller, among others. These represented a public action, performance, and dialogue, respectively. Admittedly, these things cannot be actually collected in the objective sense. I conclude this writing with two suggestions. One is a structure developed by Cuban artist, Tania Bruguera that she refers to as the "useful" archive (Bruguera, 2015). This notion of collection suggests that the price of a piece be divided into, say, five to ten years to sustain social projects in their respective locations (Bruguera, 2015). The museum might then be offering support not unlike the Dia Foundation's sponsorship of earthworks at their various sites. Another model could be Suzanne Lacy's recent practice for collection, which puts into relief the differences between making as social practice and making as representing the social for future contexts. From off-site maintenance to the commission of new work, the spectrum of response to such a diverse field of activity can be broad. But the goals of social practice may make their deepest institutional impact as they infiltrate the way institutions configure their collection practices.

NOTES

1. Lacy calls the Whisper Minnesota Project "a kind of conceptual umbrella that would embrace a series of activities" and *The Crystal Quilt* "an actual performance." Interview with the artist, Sunday, July 19, 2015.
2. This notion comes from Arjun Appadarai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value" in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology series), ed. Arjun Appadarai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63.

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Dr. Joey Orr is a curator, writer, and founding member of the idea collective, John Q. He is the Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator for Research, part of the Integrated Arts Research Initiative at the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas. At this writing, he was serving as the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Conclusions

Charlotte Bonham-Carter

Abstract This conclusion outlines the aims and intentions of the volume, and identifies common themes amongst the chapters. The volume draws together reflections on a variety of practices, policies and lived experiences, which all touch upon the social value of art. It includes analyses of instrumental cultural policies, explorations of the rhetorical tensions between social and political art in the context of neoliberal politics, experiences of artists engaged in social practices and museum responses to the social turn. The conclusion affirms that the volume intends to contextualise the rhetoric surrounding social value and the arts in a way that is useful for understanding its application to practice, policy and museums.

Keywords Instrumental cultural policy · Political art · Social value · Social practice, Neoliberal politics · Museums

Our approach to this volume aimed to be interdisciplinary, international and to draw upon perspectives from a variety of positions in the art world. In our selection of texts, we acknowledged that if we are to discuss culture in non-cultural terms, then we must necessarily embrace a wider social,

C. Bonham-Carter (✉)

Arts and Cultural, University of Arts London, London, UK

e-mail: c.bonhamcarter@csm.arts.ac.uk

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C. Bonham-Carter, N. Mann (eds.), *Rhetoric, Social Value and the Arts*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45297-5_10

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political and economic, as well as cultural, context for this discussion. In taking this approach, and in looking at the social value of art through the combined lens of policy, theory, practice and museums, we come to a number of conclusions about rhetoric, social value and the arts.

First, and most obviously, we demonstrate that while the social value of art is a focus of study across disciplines from museology and art theory to cultural policy and politics each discipline approaches the study of the social value of art from a historical context that is specific to the discipline. So, for example, Bonham-Carter and Mader discuss the social value of art alongside the development of the neoliberal state and New Labour politics. Bilbao, on the other hand, begins her discussion from a philosophical and art historical context, drawing in Plato and the ancient Greeks, and Nicolas Bourriaud and Relational Aesthetics. Beginning from such vastly different ideological starting points impacts the way in which the rhetoric surrounding social value and the arts develops, and what it means in practice.

Second, we found that in taking a multidisciplinary approach, and in bringing together a variety of agents in the field of cultural production, consumption, dissemination and participation, we demonstrate that the social value of art tends to have one meaning in the context of cultural policy – to maintain the status quo – and another – to challenge the status quo – in the context of artistic practice. Bilbao, Tunali and Rosero grapple with different possible conceptions of the social value of art, while Orr, Bradby and Stewart and Grullón all deal with the real-life complexities of socially engaged work as it inhabits different spheres, from the public to the institution.

Therefore, and finally, through the amalgamation of texts on policy, theory, practice and museums, we demonstrate that as cultural intermediaries, museums have often had to confront the challenge of responding to a rhetorically indeterminate concept, which frequently holds different meanings for different stakeholders, including policymakers/funders and artists, as well as audiences and participants. Some of our texts, which are, or involve, case studies (i.e. Bradby and Stewart, Orr and Grullón) investigate the implications of this, both for artists and museums.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RHETORIC

The literature addressing the social value of art from the cultural policy perspective draws largely upon political discourses, including the foundations of social inclusion, neoliberalism and in the UK, the New Labour

administration (see Hewison, 2014; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, etc.). The museology position, on the other hand, favours a look back to the civilising agendas of Victorian-era museums and institutions (see Bennett, 1995; Duncan, 1995, etc.). And, art theorists point to the art historical traditions of Dada, the Situationists International and others (see Bishop, 2012), as the context for exploring the social value of art. This volume includes research that grounds itself in contemporary art theory, cultural policy, political science and arts management. In bringing together these disciplines, we champion the interdisciplinary position that political, artistic, social and artistic influences have all contributed to current interest in the social value of art.

The topic of the annual meeting of the American Alliance of Museums, in April 2015, was: “The Social Value of Museums: Inspiring Change.” In many ways, the impetus for beginning this publication was, how did we get to a place where such rhetoric is so commonplace? And, what exactly do we mean by social value? In many Western nations, instrumental cultural policies grew up alongside neoliberal politics, as Bonham-Carter charts in her chapter. The moment in which cultural policy became explicit about valuing culture in non-cultural terms has been coined the “Instrumental Turn” (Belfiore, 2004). Equally, throughout the 1990s, there was renewed interest in practices which foregrounded the social value of art, a period Claire Bishop theorises as the “Social Turn” and later the “Social Re-turn,” in recognition of the strong art historical lineage of many of these types of practices. So, what is the relationship between these two “turns,” which share some common ground in the “use value” of art but which are also seemingly borne from such strikingly different positions?

In taking the interdisciplinary approach we have adopted in this volume, we explore the possible relationships between the development of cultural policies promoting the social value of the arts, and the progress of socially and politically engaged practices from the 1990s onwards. However, the variety of material in this publication quickly dispels a simple causal relationship – we can’t argue, for instance, that cultural policies just co-opted the progressive demands of the left, or that, alternatively, artistic progress merely responded to social objectives put forth by instrumental cultural policies and duly churned out socially valuable work in greater quantities. The texts in this volume show that developments in artistic practice and arts policy occurred alongside one another and often under the same umbrella principle of recognising the social value of art. However, the social value of

art is a concept that has had markedly different meanings in different professional and academic contexts.

THE SOCIAL VALUE OF ART IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Bonham-Carter and Mader's texts offer a historical account of the impact of cultural policies in the UK on museum practices. Both texts explain how instrumental cultural policies, and a certain political and administrative climate in the UK, created a new evaluative framework for art institutions, which was based upon metrics, or so-called pseudo-quantities. This meant that as "centres for social change" (DCMS, 2000) museums had to come up with hard evidence of their social impact. However, as Bonham-Carter illustrates, actual guidance on how museums could evidence social value was vague. Most cultural policy documents of the time (see DCMS, 1999, 2000, 2001; ACE, 1999, etc.) point to the ways in which participation in art can repair communities and reduce crime and truancy, ultimately bringing "excluded" citizens back into participation in the social order. This definition of social value rings true with New Labour's conception of social inclusion, which was about bringing socially excluded citizens back into civic engagement. However, as political theorists John Hills, Julian Le Grand and David Piachaurd point out, this definition of social inclusion conceptualises social exclusion as a *thing* or a *state*, rather than a *process* which is perpetrated by someone (i.e. the state) (Hills et al., 2002). In cultural policy, the social value of art is the role that art can play in moving people from a state of exclusion back into a state of inclusion, as opposed to the role it can play in *challenging* the system that failed these people in the first place.

Bilbao, Tunali and Rosero's texts all embark upon a study of socially and politically engaged art. Through case studies and theoretical analyses, the chapters illustrate the imprecise rhetoric that abounds around discussion of the social value of art. Bilbao's chapter contrasts Hal Foster's conception of Political Art, in which "art sacrifices itself in the name of social change" (Chapter 4) with Rancière and Adorno's criticism of Political Art, which argues that the potential of art is to remain autonomous from immediate use values" (Chapter 4). The latter is about reconfiguring a sphere of existence, while the former describes art of a radical disposition, which, far from the restoration of social order that is aligned to the social value of art in cultural policy, is actually about *challenging* that social order. Similarly, Rosero explores

Tania Bruguera's desire "to create useful art that instigates change in the present," a principle which guides all of Bruguera's artistic activity (Chapter 6). She describes Bruguera's series, *Tatlin's Whisper*:

... the works dismantle specific historical and political imaginaries in order to catalyse a critical awareness of how they conduct themselves now, and by extension producing a change in the way that we behave in the future. (Chapter 6)

While Bruguera is adamant in her belief that art should be "useful," the transgressive nature of her work is distinct from the explicit and implicit intentions of instrumental cultural policies, which sought to employ art as a means of bringing socially excluded individuals back into the "social order." And yet, *Tatlin's Whisper* #5 (2008), an extremely provocative piece that is discussed in Rosero's chapter, was purchased by the Tate in 2009. Despite what appears to be an ideological gulf between artists and policymakers, socially and politically engaged work has flourished in recent years with more and more works acquired by major museums (as detailed by Orr) and socially and politically engaged projects receiving large-scale financial and institutional support. The Artes Mundi Prize, in Cardiff, the Creative Time Summit in NY, and Assemblage's win of the Turner Prize in 2015 are all recent examples of the heavyweight institutional backing of socially engaged practices.

However, Rosero describes Bruguera's suspicion of "established categories of art, in particular of performance art" (Chapter 6). She says there is:

... a pervasive feeling that performance, as an institutionalised medium of contemporary art, has lost much of its relevance and urgency and has become just another art historical style or trope, sanitised and neutralised by institutionalisation. (Chapter 6)

It is right to ask then, have socially engaged practices suffered the same fate? How can art inspire social change when it operates outside of the public sphere, and is co-opted by the institution? In answer to this, Tunali's chapter defines a third category of socially engaged art the art that we encounter on the street during protests, revolts and uprisings. She concludes that:

Many collaborative art practices and the art activism on the barricades, in autonomous communities, and in community initiatives invert common

thought patterns, challenge established social and economic exchanges and interrupt what is accepted as aesthetics in art. ([Chapter 5](#))

For Tunali protest art is a form of expression that challenges the system and “ignites critical awakening” and is distinct from the kinds of socially engaged practices that are supported by and within the institutional context ([Chapter 5](#)). Tunali’s insistence that there is a “third space” of artistic activity which truly challenges our social, cultural and economic norms suggests that perhaps the gulf between socially engaged practices and cultural policies is not as wide as it might first appear. However, in attempting to clarify the rhetoric by defining a “third space,” Tunali acknowledges the wide variety of practices and positions that are corralled together within the rhetoric of social value and the umbrella term “the social turn” in art. In fact, it is perhaps the very imprecision of the rhetoric that has enabled the coupling of such disparate agendas.

The momentum of renewed interest in the social value of art in practice and policy, and the normalisation of impact evidence within funding agreements with cultural organisations quickly led to urgent questions about how art should be judged and evaluated. Bilbao details the so-called ethics versus aesthetics debate which took force after the “Social Turn,” and the possible implications of this on the kind of work that could find support:

The risk of blurring the lines between the political and the artistic by submitting them to the same ethical judgment also has practical implications. Political Art is increasingly gaining terrain and its judgment is often translated into a model of “good” practice both at an institutional as well as at a social level. In the near future this could certainly be to the detriment of less explicitly utilitarian works of art. For instance, what would happen to artists that are less concerned with making direct social contributions of this sort? What would be the destiny of funding applications for projects that are more experimental with artistic mediums and concepts? ([Chapter 4](#))

Although it is clear that the social value of art can have profoundly different meanings in different contexts, it can be said that the evidence-based cultural policy context within which the “Social Turn” developed magnified tensions about how we judge “socially and politically engaged art” or even just “art.” Furthermore, rhetorical imprecision about the social value of art enabled a wide variety of artistic practices to be

celebrated under instrumental agendas, despite the fact that some of these practices were ill suited for the museum context.

THE CHALLENGE FOR MUSEUMS AND ARTISTS

The situation outlined earlier has created a challenging landscape for both artists and museums, which have to reconcile different conceptions of the social value of art, and meet the ambitions of artists, policymakers and funders. Bronx, New York-based artist Alicia Grullón's contribution explores her own socially and politically engaged project, "PERCENT FOR GREEN." The piece provides an inspiring case study of art as a form of collective action. However, the kind of community building Grullón achieves is clearly based upon action and change, rather than the ameliorative function of art fathomed by neoliberal governments. Most of the partner organisations she works with (i.e. Mothers on the Move, South Bronx Unite, La Finca del Sur (Farm of the South), Nos Quedamos (We Stay), Bronx Climate Justice North, Friends of Tibbett's Tail, The BLK Project, Friends of Brook Park and Kelly Street Gardens) are united in their work towards an alternative position, or the radical improvement of society. While the work exists mainly outside of the institutional context, and rather in the lived experiences of people and in the development of policy change, it is supported by the Bronx Council on the Arts and Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York, as well as the charities Casita Maria Center for Arts & Education and BronxWorks.

In the case study provided by Bradby and Stewart the initiative is directly supported by the institution. However, Bradby's experience highlights the difficulties that resulted as the museum struggled to marry a number of competing agendas, including their own, the artists and presumably their funders. One can only imagine that everyone came on board to the project in agreement about the social value of the initiative. However, uncertainty about whom the initiative should reach and what role it played within the institution and its larger programme meant that the project was pulled and tugged in different directions. The case study demonstrates the actual impact of a broad brushstroke understanding of value. One of the key intentions of this book is to better understand the interaction of policy and practice. We hope that a reading of Bradby and Stewart's work within the context of this volume encourages more effort to contextualise such initiatives in a similar manner. Equally, Orr's chapter discusses some of the practical and conceptual challenges that museums

confront in showing and collecting socially engaged practices, and in doing so, demonstrates some of the complexities involved in translating socially engaged work into an institutional space. These chapters connect cultural policy, museum practices and theory to artistic practice in a way that is rarely done but which, we argue, offers a useful reading of the work, and an important means to evaluating the policy – again something that is seldom done.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the rhetoric surrounding the “social value of art” is obscure and the potential for art to enact social change may have one meaning for a policymaker, another for a museum and still yet another for an artist. Therefore, it is in the interaction between these agents that we learn the most about these nuances of interpretation, and what different agents really mean by the “social value of art.” We suspect that the rhetoric surrounding the social value of art has been stretched to meet different agendas, to access funding, to justify activities and to articulate scholarship. In some ways, the imprecision of the rhetoric has enabled a wide variety of practices to flourish including those that are disruptive, radical and which challenge the status quo. The adaptability of the art world, its ability to find ways to support alternative practices and to employ language for its own means is in fact a radical and resilient act in itself, and one of its greatest strengths. In this volume, we hope to have contextualised the rhetoric in a way that is useful for understanding “social value” as a narrative in contemporary art practice, theory, policy and museum studies. And, we hope that in clarifying this rhetoric we can assist artists, academics, museums and policymakers in creating a network of scholarship and support for a variety of distinct artistic practices.

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Charlotte Bonham-Carter is Course Leader of MA Arts and Cultural Enterprise at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, England. She has held many curatorial positions in London and maintains a professional practice as a researcher and arts management consultant.

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