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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

False Ecologies: Corporate Consciousness and Localized Practices

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

David P. White

Committee in charge:

Professor Teddy Cruz, Chair
Professor Ricardo Dominguez
Professor Kyong Park
Professor Brian Goldfarb

2013

The Thesis of David P. White is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

False Ecologies: Corporate Consciousness and Localized Practices

by

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Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

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This paper examines the influence of corporate ideologies on the institutional and structural development of three fields of inquiry: education, neighborhood development and cultural production. Within each field the growing prevalence of ideologies derived from the expanse of power of multinational corporations is examined in order to explicate how this expanded influence has been internalized by those whose work engages various heterogeneous communities through localized, embedded, practices.

INTRODUCTION

If you inject your energies, your labor
or thoughts, into a place or object
and therefore transform it
and add to its value

then forever after
those things you have added yourself to
are yours, unless you already exchanged
your energies for pay;

for example, I now own
each word in this poem,
because I added so much to it
by including it.

This poem caresses
and adds meaning to
and thoroughly improves
each word, except for some

it pushes down and hides from view.

*From the poem "4 Property Poems"
By Stan Apps*

In his seminal book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" sociologist Erving Goffman outlines a dramaturgical presentation of Self . He describes a "frontstage/backstage" framework in which the "frontstage" presentation of Self is constructed fully aware of its performative nature in the presence of a particular other or audience, while backstage activity is where the "performer" can place a diminished amount of focus onto what kind of impression that "actor" is presenting to others.¹

I begin this text with this sixty-year-old formulation because it offers a unique position from which to examine how art and culture are produced today.

¹ Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. New York: Doubleday, 1959.

It could be argued that currently there is more overtly “political art” than any other modern time. Within the popular arts there is any number of political films, novels, websites, YouTube videos, Facebook updates, comics that either take an explicit political position or clearly function implicitly as political metaphor. Netflix has a category for “Social and Political Documentaries.” In the unpopular, or fine arts, the emergence of Social Practice (the name that seems to have won out given a number of graduate programs initiated in the last several years) has centered current cultural debates around efficacy of collaboration and durational engagement in opposition to spectacular cognitive disruption as a strategy of resistant cultural practices.

At the center of this binary between Social Practice and Disruptive Art is the concept of artistic autonomy. The autonomy of art, as has been argued historically, derives from art’s uselessness as an instrumental or operational production. The autonomy of art is the premise that art has the ability to confront the viewer with symbolic visions of its radical qualities: “that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image of liberation are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence.”² Art is an object without content, at least, that is, content that is amenable to the logic of the existing social paradigmatic order. It is that which negates its context. This has

² Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. pg. 6.

been the Disruptive tradition.

The tendencies of Social Practice, on the other hand, take into account existing conditions. They often look for immediate ways in which to establish productive outcomes, frequently, through collaborative projects that resist objecthood in light of procedures or processes. As stated in one the proemial texts of Social Practice, Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics, that the intent of these works "can be summed up in just a few words: *learning to inhabit the world in a better way...* Otherwise put, the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist."³

This binary is obviously an over-simplification of what in reality is a continuum of contemporary practices that oscillate between varying degrees of collaboration and dissonance, objects and processes, negation and utopianism, ephemerality and permanence, and so on. The argument here, returning once again to Goffman's frontstage/backstage formulation, is that the autonomy that art must maintain to be an effective radical device is not located within either end of these theoretical spectra, rather within (quoting Marcuse again) the subjectivity of the individuals who either view or deploy them:

Liberating subjectivity constitutes itself in the inner history of the individual- their own history, which is not identical with their social existence. It is the particular history of their encounters, their passions, joys and sorrows- experiences which are not necessarily grounded in their class situation, and which are not even comprehensible from this perspective. To be sure, the actual

³ Bourriaud, Nicolas. Relational Aesthetics. France: les presses du reel. 2002. pg. 13. Italics are Bourriaud's.

manifestations of their history are determined by their class situation, but this situation is not the ground of their fate- of that which happens to them.”⁴

Where both disruptive and social practices fail is within the aspirational context in which they hope to find distribution. This context, commonly referred to as the “Art World” has, like many other areas of public civilization, become increasingly privatized. This privatization has been achieved through a process of intensified corporatization.

What will be argued below is that this corporatization has not only colonized every aspect of our material life-world, but that the ideological pervasiveness of corporate capitalism has so deeply seeped into our embodied subjectivities that often those practices that promote alternative methods of production, in the end, simply reproduce the existing paradigms. Goffman's frontstage/backstage presentation of Self opens up an avenue for examining the incongruities of how bodies, individual or corporate, present themselves in juxtaposition to how those bodies function when their guard is down "backstage." Frontstage, where we are fully aware of being perceived, images and proclamations of radicality abound. Backstage, where the pressures of success reveal themselves, where business is done, and where the structures of the existing order persist, is where true radical change can happen; however important symbolic gestures are in offering visions of other possible ways of being.

⁴ Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension*. pg. 5.

Below I will give several case studies to this effect. Many of these have come out of both personal experiences as well as remote research. These examples fall under three basic categories: education, neighborhood and culture. These categories were not chosen because they offer an exhaustive examination of the conditions described in the paragraphs just previous to this one, but because they are the areas in which I have had the most interest in over the course of the last several years.

Corporations are now legally people. The now infamous 2010 Supreme Court ruling, commonly referred to simply as Citizens United (*Citizens United Appellant vs. Federal Election Commission* 558 U.S. 310 130 S.Ct. 876), granted the ability of corporations unlimited spending on the endorsement of political candidates through the establishment of separate non-profit proxy corporations known as Political Action Committees (PAC's) with the intent of those candidates gaining office. While this ruling does not allow for corporations to make direct contributions to candidate's campaigns it does allow them to spend an unlimited (and anonymous) amount of money in advertising for a particular candidate as long as that PAC does not coordinate with that candidate in any way. The justification of the establishment of processes that allow unlimited spending by corporations on the advocacy of individual candidates is that to not allow this spending would be to inhibit free speech, that financial contributions constitute free speech and that corporations are allowed the same free speech rights granted by the Constitution to individuals. The absurdity of this in a party system, especially a two-party system, is so apparent as to not need further elaboration

at this point and would lead to a digression of which presently there is not the space adequately address.

What does need to be elaborated here is the extent that this Supreme Court ruling is a formal affirmation that capitalist corporatization has invaded every aspect of our lives. It is important not to forget that the etymology of the word "corporation" is derived from "*corpus*" or "body."⁵ While multinational corporations are made up of people, as an actual entity they exist as a disembodied legal abstraction in any material sense. Because their existence is not dependent on singular embodied individual, they are a Cartesian mind of pure reason, and this pure reason can only view its environment through the lens of a totalizing, and efficient, extraction of immediate resources. A disconnected mind cannot fear bodily harm. Nor can it make reasonable ethical judgments, posses emotional empathy, truly understand spatiality, or conceive of itself on a temporal continuum.

Our bodies, on the other hand, are our thinking machines. They are the expanded existence of our minds. Our bodies, as performing minds, are the basis of our spatial existence:

Our "body" and "mind" are dimensions of the primordial, ongoing organism-environment transactions that are the locus of who and what we are. Consequently, there is no mind entity to serve as the locus of reason. What we call "reason" is neither a concrete nor an abstract thing, but only embodied processes by which our experience is explored, criticized, and transformed in inquiry. Reason is more an accomplishment of inquiry than a pre-given fact or capacity.⁶

⁵Etymology Online. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=corporate>. Accessed 12/6/2012

⁶ Johnson, Mark. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. 2007. pg. 13.

EDUCATION

Growing up, teachers and guidance counselors emphasize how important it is to work hard toward the goal of attending college. The refrain from nearly every authority figure for whom education is important is that going to college is the surest way "to get a good job." The vocational aspect of education is, of course, immensely important, however, this phrase "to get a good job", in the end, is a loaded statement. It not only implies that education, especially post-secondary education, is wholly for the acquisition of marketable skills, it also implies that "good jobs" are not something to be consciously constituted by the individual possessing an educated mind, but rather awarded to that individual by some external force. This external force is tacitly understood to be national and multi-national corporations.

That "School is a Factory", the well known phrase and photographic series by artist Allan Sekula, still rings true. Sekula, in an essay accompanying his series of photographs documenting various moments in the training of young people at institutions of higher learning, states:

Both mass schooling and mass media are developments intrinsic and necessary to the corporate capitalist world order that emerged in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the United States, the decade after the First World War saw the triumph of a new national culture, a "business" culture, reproduced through compulsory education and promulgated by mass circulation periodicals, radio and the movies. These forces sought to organize people as atomized "private individuals," motivated en masse by the prospect of consumption, thus liquidating other dangerously oppositional forms of social bonding based on class, sex, race and

ethnicity.⁷

Since Sekula's series in the mid-nineteen seventies this formulation has morphed, as with much of the Industrialized World economies', from a manufacturing based to a service economy. Perhaps a new formulation of the phrase would be "School is a Shopping Mall." In higher education, students chose their courses a la carte with the aid of professor and course rating websites akin to Yelp. Universities compete for students by providing them with mall-like food courts as campus centers, spa-like recreational facilities complete with rock climbing walls, and contracts with soft drink providers that grant exclusive rights of the campus to that corporation.⁸ With the recent emergence of MOOC's (Massive Open Online Courses) they can also have their knowledge packets delivered to their homes like a late night pizza.

⁷ Sekula, Allan, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972-1996*. Normal, Illinois, University Galleries. pg. 140.

⁸ From a 1999 Ohio State press release: "*A 10-year agreement, valued at approximately \$30 million, was announced today (11/9) by The Ohio State University and Coca-Cola. The agreement, retroactive to July 1, 1998, and running through June 2008, makes Coke the official beverage provider for the Columbus campus. In return, Coca-Cola will provide cash, services and products that will be used for a wide range of academic and student activities. "We are very pleased with this contract," said President William E. Kirwan. "Coca-Cola has a long history of commitment to Ohio State, providing support for university programs for over 70 years. This agreement will generate further benefits for our students, faculty and staff. Because our students are the greatest consumers of Coca-Cola products, we will ensure that they are the ones who derive the most benefit from this agreement."*" http://www.osu.edu/news/releases/99-11-09_Coca-Cola,_OSU_Sign_Agreement.html. Accessed 4/10/13.



Figure 1: The Price student center at the University of California, San Diego. Named after Sol Price. See section on "Neighborhood".



Figure 2: Google assisting the UCSD libraries in digitizing the collection.



Figure 3: University of Phoenix in Crocker Park mall. Westlake, Ohio.



Figure 4: National University advertisement at Fashion Valley Mall, San Diego.

For the individuals providing these educational morsels, like other sectors of the service industry, their employment is increasingly part-time or temporary with little or no job security or benefits. As of 2012 a study done by the American Association of University Professors found that:

76 percent of teachers in colleges and universities are what the organization calls “contingent,” meaning full-time faculty members

who are off the secure and relatively well-paid tenure track or part-timers (often known as adjuncts) and graduate students.

The median pay for adjuncts is just \$2,700 for teaching a three-month course – and these professors are almost always on their own when it comes to health insurance and other benefits.⁹

These trends in education are additionally driven by increased numbers of privately owned for-profit schools and a turn toward for-profit models by public universities. An excellent account of this is outlined in Christopher Newfield's "Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class." In his book Newfield maps the decline of public support for universities across the country, with special attention given to the University of California system. He describes how state funding reductions in the 1990's led to disappearance of approximately a fifth of the per student fiscal support. To supplement this loss the University of California has increased private support and fees as a way to cover costs, which in turn has led to what Newfield has called the "tuition trap".

The tuition trap goes like this: The public is worried about college affordability, but its public university raises its fees. The university thus implies it does *not* actually depend on public funding, since it has the private resource of higher tuition at its fingertips. The university may also deepen this impression- that it can do without more public funding- by saying how good it is in spite of public funding cuts. Even worse, it may declare strong public funding a thing of the past in order to justify tuition increases or expanding fund-raising. Taxpayers then reasonably ask, if the university does not need more money, why does it keep raising fees? And since it keeps raising fees, why should we give it more public money?¹⁰

Newfield contrasts this with the originating intention of publicly funded

⁹ NBC News: In Plain Sight http://inplainsight.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/04/09/17658326-meet-your-new-professor-transient-poorly-paid?lite. Accessed 4/2/13.

¹⁰Newfield, Christopher, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty Year Assault on the Middle Class*. Massachusetts, Harvard University Press. pg. 182

higher education which "imagined education reducing inequalities of expertise among strata, enhancing everyone's individual potential, and making the country more profitable and equitable."¹¹ Viewed through Goffman's performative lens, the incongruity of what is stated publicly (frontstage) is in direct contradiction to the actions being taken by the University of California at the level of (backstage) policy which is eventually perceived through structural changes.

The end result is that higher education, through privatization, is no longer a tool for personal improvement. It is a tool for outsourcing vocational training that could be done as on the job training financed by the hiring body, placing the expense of this training on the student/worker themselves and the cost of the educational infrastructure on the taxpayer who originally funded the construction of the campus. After graduating the student then enters into a form of indentured servitude through debt. If a student graduates from college with \$100,000 student loan debt in which payment begins six months after graduation, how likely is that person willing to take the risks associated with economic independence such as starting their own business, independent research or invention? The requirement to "get a good job" becomes that much more pressing.

During my time as graduate student at the University of California, San Diego the incongruity of this privatization of the university collided with the desires of portions of the student body when in 2010 protests erupted on campus in response to a proposed fee increase of nearly 30%, raising the fees at that time from roughly \$7,000 to \$10,000 a year. The intensity of these protests were

¹¹ Ibid pg. 181

additionally fueled by a party held on February 15th, 2010 by students from the fraternity Pi Kappa Alpha called the "Compton Cook Out" in which attendees to the party were encouraged to dress and act in a manner consistent with some of the worst of urban black stereotypes. From the party's invitation:

February marks a very important month in American society. No, i'm not referring to Valentines day or Presidents day. I'm talking about Black History month. As a time to celebrate and in hopes of showing respect, the Regents community cordially invites you to its very first Compton Cookout.

For guys: I expect all males to be rockin Jersey's, stuntin' up in ya White T (XXXL smallest size acceptable), anything FUBU, Ecko, Rockawear, High/low top Jordans or Dunks, Chains, Jorts, stunner shades, 59 50 hats, Tats, etc.

For girls: For those of you who are unfamiliar with ghetto chicks- Ghetto chicks usually have gold teeth, start fights and drama, and wear cheap clothes - they consider Baby Phat to be high class and expensive couture. They also have short, nappy hair, and usually wear cheap weave, usually in bad colors, such as purple or bright red. They look and act similar to Shenaynay, and speak very loudly, while rolling their neck, and waving their finger in your face. Ghetto chicks have a very limited vocabulary, and attempt to make up for it, by forming new words, such as "constipulated", or simply cursing persistently, or using other types of vulgarities, and making noises, such as "hmmg!", or smacking their lips, and making other angry noises, grunts, and faces. The objective is for all you lovely ladies to look, act, and essentially take on these "respectable" qualities throughout the day.

Several of the regents condos will be teaming up to house this monstrosity, so travel house to house and experience the various elements of life in the ghetto.

We will be serving 40's, Kegs of Natty, dat Purple Drank- which consists of sugar, water, and the color purple , chicken, coolade, and of course Watermelon. So come one and come all, make ya self before we break ya self, keep strapped, get yo shine on, and join us for a day party to be remembered- or not¹².

During the several days following the party additional racially charged

¹²UCSD Wiki. http://www.ucsdwiki.com/index.php?title=Compton_Cookout Accessed 3/19/13

objects were found throughout the campus including a sign outside of UCSD TV's offices which read "Compton Lynching" and noose found hanging in one of the aisles of the main library on UCSD campus.¹³ One of the core organizers of the party, who calls himself "Jiggaboo Jones" went on several local and national talk shows defending his actions and the spirit of the party. From a statement on his website:

Compton Cookout was simply a great chance to knock down the walls of racial division and to get all sides to enjoy poking fun at all elements of racial tension. Some of these groups like The "Black Student Union" and their connected "political activists" won't allow this progress because it threatens their very existence. They simply can't have events like this because it undermines their foothold and exposes the fact that they are obsolete and in soon need of being disbanded. These political hacks played to your fears and suspicions instead of letting you all in on the whole story. The really sad part is many of you ran into the streets with "Torches & Pitchforks" without thinking about the fact that maybe someone had been withholding valuable information. This reminds me of something so familiar.... You won't find any weapons of mass destruction here either. [Scoff]¹⁴

The events surrounding the Compton Cookout worked to fuel the already planned actions for March 4, 2010 in response to the proposed fee increases, sparking several days of protests and marches on UCSD campus and throughout the city of San Diego, including a march through downtown San Diego culminating in a sit-in at state administrative building. They also pointed to the ongoing tensions of a University located in La Jolla, California, one of the wealthiest suburbs in the nation that has a very low Black and Hispanic

¹³Los Angeles Times. March 01, 2010. <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/mar/01/opinion/la-ed-ucsd2-2010mar02>

¹⁴Jiggaboojones.com
http://www.jiggaboojones.com/Compton_cookout_Final_Official_Statement_jiggaboo_jones.htm.
Accessed 3/13/13.

population and correlating student body.

To say that the protests of March 4th 2010 had a coalescing effect within the Visual Arts Department would be an understatement. Many of the graduate students worked long into the night on the evening of March 3rd to produce graphic posters, flyers and t-shirts in solidarity with the student undergraduates leading the protests. Additionally, a graduate seminar led by Professor Jordan Crandall produced a website with downloadable and printable graphics which appropriated the UCSD coat of arms by switching out the phrase "Let There Be Light" for "Let This Be Public Now". This "new" coat of arms was added to a series of downloadable and printable 8.5 x 11 inch pdf's that had large black and white graphics of phrases such as "Public space, Public Education, Public Library" and so on that could be posted throughout campus and made into banners during marches.¹⁵ A link to these files was subsequently distributed via email and social media to affiliated campus individuals and known activists. Thousands of copies of these files were then printed on campus computing stations and these graphic objects became one of the primary visual symbols emblemizing the March 4th protests.

Roughly during this same time frame a series of lectures and panel discussions curated by UCSD Visual Arts Professor John Welchman took place called "Public Culture in the Visual Sphere". I participated in a panel discussion as part of this series on January 14, 2010 called "Pros and Cons: Graduate

¹⁵ The original website is no longer hosted. Images and videos of the flyers in use can be found on a Facebook page made for that day at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Public-UC-Let-This-Be-Public-Now/338309172981> . The original I.P. address was publicuc.org.

Research in Public Culture". Considering the nature of the events described above, it was a timely series and offered a thoughtful theoretical perspective on the events that were unfolding in such close temporal and physical proximity.

Coincidentally one of these panel discussions took place on same day as the March 4th protests. This panel was co-sponsored and held off campus at the non-profit arts and music library known as the Athenaeum in La Jolla. The panelists that evening included UCSD Visual Arts Professor Teddy Cruz as moderator, the writer and essayist Rebecca Solnit, Rick Lowe of Project Row Houses in Houston, Matt Coolidge Founder and Director of The Center For Land Use Interpretation, and artist and Otis College Professor Suzanne Lacy.

Having participated in the protests on campus on the morning of March 4th, an occupation of the chancellor's office in the afternoon, a march on the state building in the evening and the panel discussion describe above, needless to say, the day was an impressive showing of mass public action, solidarity and, anecdotally, a personally informative and moving experience. As the day began to wind down and many of the students from the visual arts department made our way to the Athenaeum for the panel discussion many of the students who tried to attend this event were turned away. As I had RSVP's in advance I was on a list that allowed me to gain access. After listening to the informative talks given by each of the respective panelists it was clear, and this was confirmed in post-event conversations with other attendees, that there seemed to be a glaring disconnect between the protest events of the day and the context within which this panel discussion was held: a private library in the affluent community of La

Jolla, twenty miles removed from downtown San Diego. While the organizers and participants of this discussion could not have known in advance that March 4th, 2012 would have unfolded as it did, it does point to disconnected realities between standard academic practices and their supportive structures (as this panel at the Athenaeum was) and what functions as productive protest post-9/11, even given, to be sure, the important contributions each of the panelists have made within their individual bodies of work to give (visual) language to critical positions on such issues as urban economic disparity, housing, public space and perpetuations of Manifest Destiny, etc.

To further illustrate this point, the final event of Public Culture in the Visual Sphere series was a talk by the communist philosopher Alain Badiou on May 25th, 2010, just two-and-half months after the events of March 4th. This final event was held in a sometimes UCSD Visual Arts affiliated space called the Haudenschild Garage. Eliose Haudenschild, the founder of this space and in whose “garage” these events take place, is an avid arts supporter, advocate and collector. The Haudenschild Garage was founded, according to the website, with the intent of being,:

a 21st century cultural search engine, pursuant of interesting work wherever it occurs and in whatever form it takes. Today, the *haudenschild* **Garage** hopes to transcend the 19th century salon and the 20th century alternative art space by providing a home away from home to all seeking to engage in cultural experimentation and conversation. It routinely presents symposia, lectures and film screenings.

The night of the Badiou lecture attendee’s were required to RSVP to the event in the La Jolla space. While again, all parties involved in organizing this

event acted within academic institutional norms, it is not difficult to see how a young undergraduate student from a working class background would be off-put by the need to RSVP to this event and then subsequently to travel to the garage of a house in a zip code with one of the highest median housing prices in the nation to attend an event by a communist philosopher (Figure 5-6). Just two short months earlier, this same student may have placed her own body on the line in protests for affordable and open education at the very university affiliated with the “Public Culture in the Visual Sphere” lecture series. While understanding that it is completely reasonable for any venue to want an attending audience to be commiserate with the space available, it is difficult to understand why this event was not simply held in any one of the readily available campus auditoria or gathering spaces, especially given the tenor of the campus after the March 4th events.

Once more, a disconnect emerges between what is conveyed frontstage and what is produced backstage. The Haudenschild Garages' stated desire to “transcend” the “alternative space” is directly at odds with the conservative position of housing an “alternative space” in the same spatial construct that equates art to other luxury items like a Porche or BMW and whose ostensible accessibility is comparable to sidewalks in a gated community: public in theory, but not in practice.

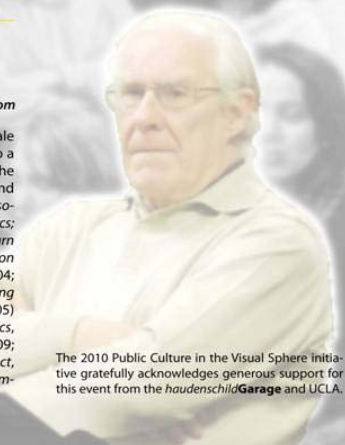
PUBLIC CULTURE IN THE VISUAL SPHERE

... Week Twelve ...

May 25
Tuesday
6:30 pm

Alain Badiou
· Cultures and Truths

Event will be held at the **haudenschildGarage**
at **1870 La Jolla Rancho Road, La Jolla 92037**
Please RSVP before May 23 to monica@haudenschildgarage.com



Born in 1937 in Rabat, Morocco, **Alain Badiou** is Professor of Philosophy at École Normale Supérieure, Paris. One of the leading social philosophers of his generation, Badiou is also a novelist (*Almagest*, 1964) and playwright (*Ahmed le Subtil*, 1994). A founder member of the Unified Socialist Party (PSU), his political affiliations have included the far left UCFML and (from 1985) L'Organisation Politique. His books include, in translation, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, SUNY Press, (1989) 1999; *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Minnesota UP, (1997) 1999; *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Verso, (1993) 2000; *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, Continuum, 2003; *Metapolitics*, Verso, (1998) 2005; *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Stanford UP, (1997) 2003; *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Stanford UP, (1998) 2004; *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, SUNY Press, (1998) 2005; *Being and Event*, Continuum, (1988) 2005; *Polemics*, Verso, 2007; *The Century*, Polity Press, (2005) 2007; *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, re.press, (1969) 2007; *Number and Numbers*, Polity, (1990) 2008; *Conditions*, Continuum, 2009; *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, Volume 2*, Continuum, (2006) 2009; *Theory of the Subject*, Continuum, (1982) 2009; *Philosophy in the Present*, (with Slavoj Žižek), Polity, 2010; *The Communist Hypothesis*, Verso, 2010; and *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Polity, (2009) 2010.

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Curated by John C. Welchman

In collaboration with VALS committee 2009-10 (Visual Arts Department Lecture Series: Anya Gallaccio, Teddy Cruz, Kyong Park, Suzanne Wright), the Public Culture graduate committee (Edward Sterrett, Orianna Caccione, Cara Baldwin, Katrin Pesch, Sara Mameni, Tara Zeipel), and Jordan Crandall.

Supported by the Visual Arts Department, UCSD; Dean of Arts and Humanities, UCSD; SoCCAS [Southern California Consortium of Art Schools]

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Figure 5

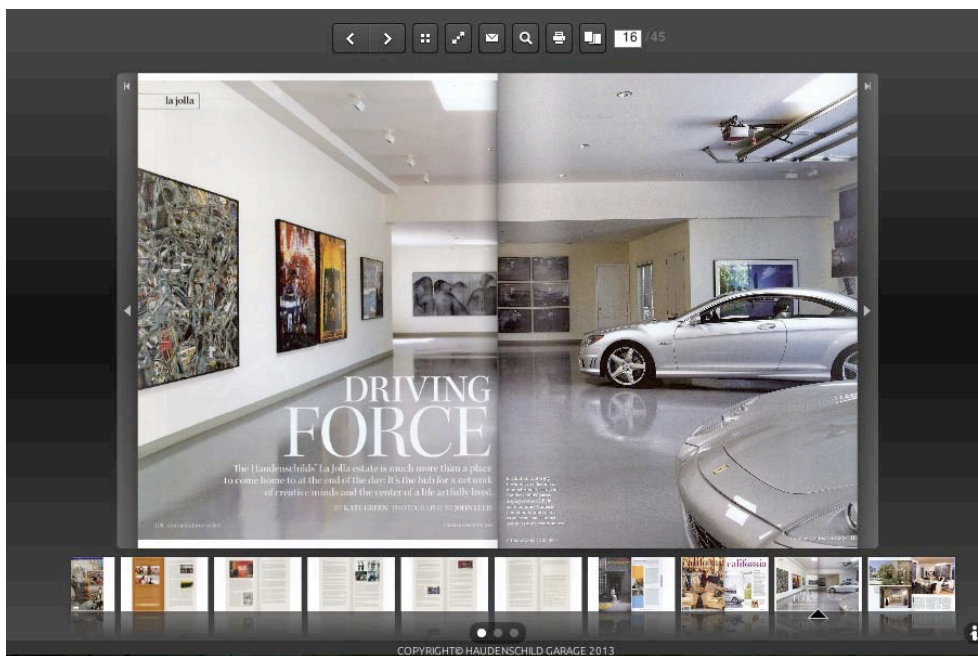


Figure 6: Screen shot of a publication image of the HaudenschildGarage from the HaudenschildGarage website.

Naturally, what I am not implying here is that these very localized events have a direct causal relationship to the increase in student fees at the University of California. The increase in student fees is more fundamentally predicated upon a system of financialization in which the ability of the university to raise revenue is channeled through the selling bonds for the construction of physical space, through the inability for the state of California to raise taxes because all budgetary adjustments must be approved by a two-thirds vote- rendering the state budget a hostage of 36% of the state legislature, and the conditions outlined by Newfield. What these practices do is reinforce at a daily level the scenarios of the "tuition trap" cited above. Frontstage are the proclamations of open education, economic equity, and social solidarity, while backstage practices remain gated, removed and for those whose social position grants them privileged access.

The 2837 University is a project of the Agitprop space in North Park. It began with the question: "Could a "university" be assembled out of pre-existing neighborhood spaces?" and is an attempt to desegregate knowledge structures from their usual dichotomies: academic/non-academic, practical/theoretical etc. The first course of the 2837 University examined how to go about doing this. Participants in the establishment of the 2837 University included teachers, community activists, small business owners and artists. The results of this course led to the following mission statement:

"The 2837 University is a network of creative thinkers, small businesses, community members and sites in North Park (San Diego, CA). It encourages knowledge exchange by facilitating courses and events which coordinate the interests and resources of the North Park community and environs. Open exchange, and the blending of theory and practice, is the central idea and activity of the university; blurring the student teacher dichotomy, and fostering projects and resources that are financially and locally accessible to all."

Responses will be posted at: <http://agitprop.space.org>
 Upcoming projects/courses: <http://agitprop.space.org/the-2837-university/>
 Send inquiries to: contact@agitprop.space.org

Figure 7: 2837 University description card for museum goers. The 2837 University project was initiated through a series of meeting with small business owners, artists, teachers and urban activists. The result was the formulation of the statement in the card above and a series of classes examining various aspects of the neighborhood where the Agitprop space was located. The name of the "University" came from the address of the Agitprop space - 2837 University Ave.

The 2837 University

Institutions of higher education have increasingly been moving toward models of privatization and/or being owned by for-profit companies. How do you think this effects what students learn?:

PRIVATIZATION WILL SERVE
 INCREASINGLY NARROW INTERESTS
 + THE LEARNINGS WILL INCREASINGLY
 BECOME SELF-SERVING TO THE
 OWNERS + TRANSITION INTO
 PROPAGANDA

Figure 8: As a side project to the 2837 University project a series of questions were given out to visitors during one night of the Summer Salon Series at the San Diego Museum of Art.

The 2837 University

Should there be *more* or *less* public debate about contemporary issues inside of cultural institutions?

more less

Why? IF THERE IS NO PUBLIC DEBATE
 IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS, THOSE
 INSTITUTIONS SEEM TO BE CULTURAL
 DEBATE, DISCUSSION + COMMUNITY BUILDING
 IS THE PURPOSE OF A CULTURAL INSTITUTION

Figure 9: Public Debate

NEIGHBORHOOD

Starbucks, the American coffee house giant, has a practice of selling “fair trade” coffee and encouraging exuberantly friendly service from its employees towards consumers at the front counter. While the signage advertising fair trade coffee at the front counter promotes an image of global responsibility, the friendly greetings persuade consumers that this particular Starbucks is as locally embedded as the mom-and-pop coffee shop around the corner. In fact, the “community” page on the Starbucks website reads:

From the neighborhoods where our stores are located, to the ones where our coffee is grown – we are committed to helping communities thrive where we do business.

Bringing people together, inspiring change and making a difference in people's lives – it's all part of being a good neighbor. And it's a commitment rooted in the belief that we can balance profitability and a social conscience.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Starbucks backstage policy is “*to drop “clusters” of outlets in urban areas already dotted with cafes and espresso bars. This strategy relies just as heavily on an economy of scale as Wal-Mart’s does and the effect on competitors is much the same.... It’s a highly aggressive strategy, and it involves something the company calls “cannibalization.”* Starbucks methods of implementing this “cannibalization” entails that they “*saturate an area with stores until the coffee competition is so fierce that sales drop even in individual*

¹⁶ <http://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/community> Accessed 11/22/12.

Starbucks outlets".¹⁷ So while the frontstage presentation of the corporate Self is that of locally embedded, globally responsible actor, the backstage practices work to undermine individually owned businesses and local economies through economic scorched earth policies.

The philosopher Slavoj Zizek has written extensively on the topic of contemporary power relations. A recurring theme within his writings points to a shift from traditional inter-subjective power relations in which the domineering actor clearly internalized and exuded his (gender use intentional here) overt position of domination. Zizek contrasts this with the contemporary power-holder that, while posturing as a friendly, benevolent, socially concerned, neutral manager, still maintains the operational power position of the traditional dominant actor and thus obfuscates what were once clearly defined social positions with, what are on the surface, gestures of benign geniality.

In "Defense of Lost Causes" Zizek gives a hypothetical characterization of a business executive: "When I am a brutal executive who, deep within myself, feel that this is just the public mask and that my true Self discloses itself in my spiritual meditations (and imagine my friends telling people: "His brutal business efficiency shouldn't deceive you - he is really a very refined and gentle person..."), this is not the same as when I am a polite person who, on the internet, gives way to violent fantasies. The site of subjective identification shifts: in the internet case, I think that I am really a polite person, and that I am just playing with violent fantasies, while, as a New Age businessman, I think that I am

¹⁷ Klein, Naomi. *No Logo*. London: Harper Collins. 2001 pgs. 136-137.

just playing a public role in my business dealings, while my true identity is my inner Self enlightened through meditation".¹⁸

To offer a concrete example, I would venture to say that Zizek's hypothetical businessman clearly references one of the paradigmatic CEO's of our time: Steve Jobs. Jobs, as many posthumous biographical accounts have pointed out, was notoriously Machiavellian in his manipulation of the emotions of those in Apple's employ in the interest of achieving desired ends for Apple while simultaneously projecting an image of a Post-Sixties high tech spiritual guru who placed as much emphasis on aesthetics as he did functionality in Apple's products. This aesthetic emphasis was not merely in the realm of the visual, but had its origins in the eastern philosophies Jobs studied as a young man in which mundane actions take on enhanced meaning when enacted as fully considered operations. Jobs cites this relationship in his now famous commencement speech at Stanford University from 2005 in which he describes how the calligraphy course he took after dropping out of college gave him an understanding of the pleasure that well considered design can give a user outside of pure technical operationality. He states that this calligraphy course led to his insistence, at the beginning of his career, on taking aesthetic qualities into consideration even at the most rudimentary level as what font was used on the earliest home computers. Jobs' evocation of the aesthetic is implied in this speech to be one of the key reasons for Apple's success during both stages of

¹⁸ Zizek, Slavoj. In *Defense of Lost Causes*. Brooklyn, New York: Verso. 2008. pg 13.

his tenure at Apple and for the success of consumer computers in general.¹⁹

Job's image as a spiritual creative genius is dependent upon a material backstage that must be obfuscated to maintain an transcendental public persona. Apple's success is also predicated on the ability of the company to manufacture its products at a low cost. Apple's overseas labor practices received international attention several times during and after Jobs' leadership. For example, at one iPhone factory, the Foxconn plant in Shenzhen, China, working conditions were so toxic that the company had to install nets around manufacturing facilities in order to prevent a prolonged rash of suicides that were a reaction to the appalling working conditions in the factory, as well as quell a riot in 2012 of nearly 2000 workers.^{20 21}

Approximately 30 miles south of Shenzhen on Hong Kong island there is relatively small shopping center called Stanley Plaza built in 2001 in the city of Stanley on the south side of Hong Kong island.²² Like the strategies of Starbucks listed above this mall is constructed adjacent to the famous Stanley Market. Stanley Market is a well known local and tourist destination made up of small individually owned stalls of merchandise ranging from various local foods, flea market kitsch to name brand (and knockoff) leather bags (Figure 11). The mall, obviously capitalizing on the notoriety of the Stanley Market, is situated

¹⁹ <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html> Accessed 10/25/12.

²⁰ Watts, Jonathan. "Foxconn offers pay rises and suicide nets as fears grow over wave of deaths". The Guardian May 28, 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/28/foxconn-plant-china-deaths-suicides/>

²¹ Hamilton, David. "Foxconn confirms riot at taiyuan factory" Cnet.com. September 12, 2010.

http://news.cnet.com/8301-1001_3-57518617-92/foxconn-confirms-worker-riot-at-taiyuan-factory/

²² <http://www.thelinkreit.com/EN/properties/Pages/Property-Locator-Search-Result.aspx?did=18&cid=1&kw=&pid=33> Accessed 4/22/13.

halfway between the densest cluster of stalls and one of the most prominent historical tourist attractions in the city of Stanley: the mid-eighteenth century T'ien Hou temple. Predictably the portion of Stanley Plaza that abuts the temple houses a Starbucks.



Figure 10: T'ien Hou Temple (left) adjacent to the Stanley Plaza Starbucks and McDonalds (right).



Figure 11: Stanley Market

So here we have a concrete example of what was outlined above: Starbucks as a global corporate actor capitalizing off a pre-existent local economy of small businesses owned by local individuals. In all fairness Starbucks is not the only multi-national franchise corporation in the Stanley Plaza mall. As Figure 10 can attest McDonalds is present as well.

Stanley Plaza is owned by The Link Real Estate Investment Trust (or The Link REIT). From the The Link REIT website the organization boasts that The Link REIT is:

the first real estate investment trust listed in Hong Kong and is currently the largest in Asia in terms of market capitalisation. Wholly owned by private and institutional investors, The Link REIT has been listed on The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong Limited (the "Hong Kong Stock Exchange") since 25 November 2005.

As at 30 September 2012, the portfolio consists of properties with an internal floor area ("IFA") of approximately 11 million square feet ("sq ft") of retail space and approximately 80,000 car park spaces.

The portfolio's retail facilities, located on the doorstep of over 40% of Hong Kong's households, primarily serve the daily needs of people in Hong Kong. The car parks mainly serve tenants and customers of the retail facilities and residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods.

The current investment strategy of The Link REIT's manager, The Link Management Limited (the "Manager"), is to invest in sustainable, income-producing non-residential properties (predominantly retail-based, but excluding hotels and serviced apartments) and car parks in Hong Kong and to maximise their value through asset enhancement works encompassing improvements in physical structure, trade mix, customer service and promotional activities. As these enhancement projects progress, the portfolio offers customers a better shopping experience with more choices at reasonable prices, whilst improving returns for unitholders of The Link REIT ("Unitholders").

And

As Hong Kong's first listed REIT and Hong Kong's largest privatization [sic] of its kind at the time, The Link REIT's listing was a milestone for Hong Kong's financial market and the community at large. The divestment has been mutually beneficial for the Government, the real estate and financial markets, and the people of Hong Kong.

Since the listing, The Link has focused on rejuvenating properties in its portfolio and realising the full potential of its properties in line with its vision of being a world-class real estate investor and manager that serves and brightens the lives of people in the local community.²³

The "divestment" referred to in Link's statement was from the Hong Kong Housing Authority which was established to maintain affordable rental properties for the poor in Hong Kong. Over the course of time the HA (Housing Authority) acquired numerous commercial units and parking spaces within or adjacent to its development projects. Notably this divestment was challenged in a court proceeding in which a local apartment dweller, Lo Siu-lan, filed suit against this transference from the Housing Authority to the Link REIT, a transference underwritten by HSBC, UBS and Goldman Sachs, because she thought that the transference would raise rates on small street market sellers and housing occupants.²⁴ Ms. Lo, age 67 who earned just \$427 a month at time that the proceedings began, had to partner with a local activist organization since she had never learned to write. Eventually, after several appeals, the case would be

²³ <http://www.thelinkreit.com/EN/aboutus/Pages/Corporate-History-and-Profile.aspx> Accessed 4/22/13

²⁴ Bradasher, Keith. "Tenant delays \$2.73 billion Hong Kong deal" Chicago Tribune. January 23, 2005. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-01-23/business/0501230465_1_housing-projects-hong-kong-public-housing

thrown out and the transference of the properties to the Link REIT was completed. Since the privatization Ms. Lo said that "In my estate, many shopkeepers in the market said they couldn't stand the rent rises and were closed after Link took over. Security guards and cleaners tell me they face being laid off. I too have to take a bus to Tsuen Wan to buy food from cheaper markets as things have become expensive here" and that "I predicted that shopkeepers would face increased rents and would be unable to survive, that things would become more expensive and workers would be laid off. Now my fears have come true." The initial public offering of the LinkREIT attracted 503,000 bids valued at approximately \$2.7 billion in total.²⁵

Apple's exploitation of workers in less regulated countries such as China is the type of thing reported on daily as one of the nasty effects of globalization. What is less apparent is how the subtle colonization urban neighborhoods by corporate capital through neoliberal strategies has infected not only the spatial occupations of neighborhoods, but the mental space of those with the agency to develop the built environment. It is more than just the pervasiveness of Walmarts, Targets, and Home Depots moving into suburban environments, it is the internalization of these strategies deployed by these giants that is subtly internalized by those looking to make improvements in core and first ring urban areas that are frequently built out to the point that it becomes difficult for big box stores to have square acreage needed to accommodate their massive land use requirements.

²⁵ Ibid.

One of these such locales is Lakewood, Ohio. Lakewood is a first ring suburb of Cleveland and is its own incorporated city. Despite its categorization as a "suburb" it has one of the highest population densities between New York and Chicago. The city is built on streetcar plan with five main boulevards running in an east/west orientation from which radiate, in a grid, narrow streets (some still brick surfaced) lined with a mixture of single family homes, numerous double and duplex houses, and large numbers of apartment complexes. Interestingly, Lakewood's small geographic footprint (5.6 square miles) contains an astonishing economic spectrum, with multi-million dollar homes along the shores of Lake Erie, to fifty-thousand dollar colonials adjacent to Cleveland proper.²⁶ Most of the homes and business in the city were built prior to World War II.

The streetcar model of the urban plan in, conjunction with its density, has made new development difficult for the city. Most existing storefronts are small and designed to be approached by foot. Being adjacent to the once industrial giant of Cleveland there was little heavy industry in Lakewood and so there are no current "empty warehouses" to be demolished and renovated into condos, mass housing developments or strip-malls. Because of this one of the persistent problems for the city of Lakewood has to find sources through which to raise taxes. In 2003 and 2004 this situation came to national attention when the mayor at that time pushed a plan to redevelop an area of the city known as the West End. The \$150 million project proposed for the West End included a new headquarters for the cosmetics manufacturer Bonnie Bell, shopping and upscale

²⁶ <http://www.onelakewood.com/> Accessed 5/10/13.

condominiums. The proposed site for this project is a neighborhood consisting of mediums sized two and three bedroom homes and a several apartment complexes. The city, led by Mayor Cain, proposed a ballot initiative to use eminent domain to purchase the properties in the area slated for development. In order for the use of eminent domain to be justified the properties had to be shown to be of less value to the city in light of the potential tax revue to be gained from the new development. In a study conducted by a private firm hired by the city many of the homes were deemed "blighted". The definitions that the firm used to justify the designation of "blight" were taken from a book called the "Shopping Center Development Handbook" which defines blighted homes as having less than three bedrooms, not having an attached two car garage, and possessing central air conditioning.²⁷ This case received national attention when one of families, the Saleets, and Mayor Cain were featured on a 60 Minutes segment focused on eminent domain. In an exchange now famous in Lakewood Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes had the following conversation with Mayor Cain:

Wallace: My understanding is, that using the criteria, in place, that more than 90% the houses in Lakewood could be deemed "blighted". Including the houses of the Mayor [pointing at Cain], and of every one of the city council members. True?

Cain: [sighs, long pause, smiles]

Wallace: Do you have two bathrooms?

²⁷"How the West End was won" Cleveland Magazine. January 2004.
<http://www.clevelandmagazine.com/ME2/dirmod.asp?sid=E73ABD6180B44874871A91F6BA5C249C&nm=&type=Publishing&mod=Publications%3A%3AArticle&mid=1578600D80804596A222593669321019&tier=4&id=17D0F0D43A294EBA9D36CE8B3F3197AA>

Cain: No.

Wallace: Blight.

Two car garage?

Cain: No.

Wallace: Blight.

Is the garage attached?

Cain: No. [laughing]

Wallace: Blight.

And your lot size is under 5000 square feet?

Cain: Oh, well under.

In the next election cycle the citizens of Lakewood voted down the project by a margin of 39 votes and ousted Mayor Cain from office.²⁸

In San Diego, a similar project to the one proposed in Lakewood was developed in the late 1990's and early 2000's. This development was pushed forward, not by a government official, but by Sol Price, the founder of Price Club, one of the first membership based big box retailers. Price Club eventually merged with Cost-Co making Sol Price one of the richest men in America. A graduate of San Diego High School Sol Price looked to establish a philanthropic project toward the end of his life with the intention of helping to change a particular neighborhood for the better. The neighborhood he eventually chose was that of City Heights in San Diego.

²⁸ In 2005 the Federal Supreme Court ruled on *Kelo v. City of New London*, 545 U.S. 469 (2005) upholding the transference of land from one private owner to another if it benefits the community through increased tax revenues.

In 1965 San Diego City council approved the Mid-City plan with intention increasing density in City Heights by exchanging many of the single family homes with multi-family apartment complexes in hopes of shoring up a consumer base that was being lost to the newly developed areas of Mission and Fashion Valleys to the north. This process, along with "white flight" so prevalent in the late 1960's and 1970's of the urban core marked an era of economic decline for City Heights that was to continue through the mid 1990's.

It is at this point that a coalition of community members who were fed up with the lack of city involvement in the area and high crime rates began to partner with Sol Price to develop new revitalization efforts. Price partnered with William Jones, who was a former city council member, and who had had a brief mentee relationship with Price in the 1980's, and Jack McGrory, who at the time of meeting Price, was a San Diego City Manager. The three individuals began implementing a series of comprehensive community redevelopment projects that intelligently took a holistic approach to revitalization including an new police sub-station (Sol Price loaned the city money for this project), education infrastructure and educational programs that were integrated with San Diego State University, as well as upgraded or affordable housing. Eventually Sol Price and William Jones would go on to found the City Heights Revitalization Corporation- now Price Charities.²⁹

As these projects began to unfold Price and Jones decided to split their

²⁹ Much of the information here is derived from an excellent documentary on this issue called "The Price of Renewal" directed by Paul Espinosa. More information on this documentary can be found at <http://www.californiadreamseries.org/>

efforts with Price continuing the non-profit redevelopment projects and Jones focusing on for-profit real estate ventures. On this real estate front Jones moved on a opportunity to develop a retail shopping center in the what has come to be known as the City Heights Urban Village and symbolic center of the redevelopment efforts initiated by Price, Jones and McGrory.³⁰

At the time that this commercial development was underway neighborhood constituents began voicing dissenting opinions on what the ultimate effects were of these revitalization efforts. Due to the inexpensive real estate prices after the City Height's downturn in the 1970's the neighborhood became an attractor for a large number of immigrant and refugee families and is now currently one of the most diverse neighborhoods in southern California. These immigrant communities include large populations of Mexican, Iraqi, East African and Vietnamese residents. Forty-two percent of City Heights residents are foreign born and nearly twenty-seven percent live at or below the poverty line.³¹

With this influx of immigrant communities a vast array of small businesses catering to the specific needs of the constituent groups arose over the last thirty years. These include a wide variety of ethnic shops, grocers, and restaurants. As Jones's commercial development progressed it became clear that these businesses would be left out of the new development in favor of corporate multi-national chains. In order to secure the loans needed to build the shopping center

³⁰ <http://www.pricecharities.com/City-Heights-Initiative/> Accessed 4/15/13.

³¹ Ibid.

the financial backers and loaning institutions wanted the certainty that comes with multi-national's deep pockets and ability to cover rent.

Nicholas Tran, the owner of a fast growing Vietnamese market in City Heights was a local business owner who wanted to be a part of the new commercial shopping center and was subsequently denied. Albertsons, the grocery store giant, on the other hand was given occupancy at the shopping center. Tran would have even reduced the number of non-Vietnamese items so as not to be in direct competition with Albertsons if allowed into the development, but as Tran stated in an interview, "We have no problem competing against Albertsons right next to us, but apparently Albertsons has a problem competing against us."³² At the time that the development acquired full occupancy the only "asian" business in the shopping center was Panda Express, the fast Chinese food franchise.

The ramifications of both the non-profit initiatives led by Price and the for-profit endeavors led by Jones have had both positive and negative outcomes. The schools that Price Charities has been involved with have improved. The shopping center bustles with activity almost constantly. Crime is down.

On the flip side, home prices have risen so dramatically that many of the residents for whom these improvements were intended to assist can no longer afford to live in City Heights. As Sol Price himself has said, "When you make a community too much better than it was you have the problem that, in effect, you

³² "The Price of Renewal" directed by Paul Espinosa <http://www.californiadreamseries.org/>

are driving the problem from that area to someplace else."³³

When organizing for a There Goes the Neighborhood (see Figure 37) event, I was part of team conducting interviews to be used as research material for one of the performances (Figure 38). Some of these interviews were with youth from the City Heights advocacy organization called Mid-City CAN (Community Action Network). During these interviews one of the organizers at CAN, Mark Tran, who is an impressive and articulate neighborhood advocate, described a internship placement program that locates youth in corporate internships. When I asked why not have a program that is about individual entrepreneurship or working for a small businesses, he replied "because we want them to be good jobs." Mid-City CAN is partially sponsored by Price Charities and is housed in one the developed buildings described above. The interviews were conducted in the shadow of the Urban Village.

The above scenarios neatly fall under what David Harvey, in his book "A Brief History of Neoliberalism", has called "accumulation by dispossession".³⁴

Accumulation by dispossession, according to Harvey, is defined by four qualities:

1. Privatization and Commodification: "The corporatization, commodification, and privatization of hitherto public assets has been a signal feature of the neoliberal project."
2. Financialization: "The strong wave of financialization that set in after 1980 has been marked by its speculative and predatory style. The total daily turnover of financial transactions in international markets, which stood at \$2.3 billion in 1983, had risen to \$130 billion in by 2001."
3. The management and manipulation of crises: "The analogy with the deliberate creation of unemployment to produce a labor surplus

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Harvey, David. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005. pg 159-164

convenient for further accumulation is exact. Valuable assets are thrown out of use and lose their value. They lie fallow until capitalists possessed of liquidity choose to breathe new life into them.”

4. State redistributions: “The state, once neoliberalized, becomes a prime agent of redistribution policies, reversing the flow from upper to lower classes that had occurred during the era of embedded liberalism.”

As Steve Jobs was keenly aware of, and what Harvey does not address in this instance, is the effect culture and aesthetics can have on situations of "accumulation by dispossession" and the soft colonizations described above.

Just a few miles away from the Urban Village in City Heights is a mixed-use development called La Boheme. La Boheme is located at the most trafficked intersection in the San Diego neighborhood of North Park at 30th Street and University Ave. From a fact sheet, the \$62 million project boasts "This mixed-use development includes 179 market-rate for-sale condominium homes, 45 affordable housing for-sale units, over 15,000 square feet of ground level commercial space and 371 parking spaces. The project has seven different floor plans ranging in size from 900 to 1,100 square feet" and was completed in 2006. The project is a partnership between San Diego's now defunct Redevelopment agency and Western Pacific Housing, a D.R. Horton company."³⁵ D.R. Horton company is the largest homebuilder in the United States and:

constructs and sells homes through its operating divisions in 26 states and 77 metropolitan markets of the United States, primarily under the name of D.R. Horton, America's Builder. During the fiscal year ended September 30, 2012 (fiscal 2012), the Company closed 18,890 homes. Through its financial services operations, the Company provides mortgages financing and title agency services to

³⁵ <http://www.sandiego.gov/redevelopment-agency/pdf/nplabohemefactsheet.pdf> Accessed 2/10/13

homebuyers in many of its homebuilding markets.³⁶

North Park has seen a significant amount of change over the last decade while transforming from a struggling low income neighborhood into one of the trendiest and most desirable communities in which to live in San Diego. In fact, over the last several years the neighborhood has been cited nationally by publications such as the New York Times, who called it "one of the city's most vibrant and diverse districts", and Forbes magazine which ranked North Park 13th on the Forbes' "America's Best Hipster Neighborhoods" list for being "home to Craftsman cottages, cafes and diners, coffee shops, several microbreweries, boutiques, and the North Park Farmers Market. The North Park Theater and the Ray Street Arts District are also bastions of creativity in the area."³⁷



Figure 12: La Boheme

³⁶New York Times Business Day. June 5, 2013

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/horton_d_r_inc/index.html

³⁷ Brennan, Morgan. "America's Best Hipster Neighborhoods" Forbes. September 20, 2012.

<http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mhj45jmeh/13-north-park-san-diego-ca-2/>

"Creativity" is often cited as one of the key factors in turning the neighborhood around. Much of the "creative impulse" in the neighborhood was centered around Ray Street just one block east of the main intersection of University Avenue and 30th Street. Ray Street, for the last twelve years has been home to Ray at Night, a monthly art walk showcasing some of the small arts businesses on a short portion of the block.

The establishment of Ray at Night in 2001 is often noted as one the catalyzing developments in the turn of the neighborhood toward its current state, but revitalization efforts go back even further. In 1985 the neighborhood was the second to be designated by the city of San Diego as Business Improvement District (BID), the first being the Gaslamp District in downtown San Diego. In 1996 a Main Street office was established as part of a national Main Street program sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation which "promotes the revitalization of historic commercial districts and supports their small, independently-owned businesses."³⁸

La Boheme is a development that falls under North Park Main Street's jurisdiction. While Main Street's stated goals are that which "promotes the revitalization of historic commercial districts and supports their small, independently-owned businesses", it is difficult to see how a condominium complex as large a La Boheme falls under this rubric given that the developers

³⁸North Park Main Street's website: <http://northparkmainstreet.com/about/north-park-main-street-who-we-are/> Accessed 5/10/13.

are a publicly traded national corporation, the building's overwhelming scale in comparison to existing structures, and its "Tuscan" facade that ultimately looks marginally different from the architecture of Stanley Plaza (Figure 12-13).³⁹ Granted that some of the businesses that have moved into the commercial spaces are owned by San Diego based companies or individuals, the development itself displaced smaller scale storefronts whose diminutive square footage made those spaces economically feasible to an individual of lesser means who hoped to open a business. One such business that has been affected by the construction of La Boheme is the Get It Clean Laundry Mat on 30th Street. In conversations with the owners of Get It Clean they have stated that since La Boheme was completed their business has been adversely affected because of several factors including parking taken up by the new larger business in the development, that tenants of La Boheme have the own washers and dryers, and simply the diminished visibility of their modest storefront in relationship to the relative massive scale of La Boheme. The effect of this scenario mirrors the conditions outlined above in Stanley near Hong Kong.

Interestingly, in both Stanley and North Park objects of aesthetic signification become not only tools for the exclusion of the socio-economic groups being displaced from these neighborhoods but the condition of economic disparity itself become the fetish objects for attracting consumers from higher socio-economic positions. La Boheme capitalizes off of a romanticized notion of poverty connoted by "bohemian" imagery, while simultaneously being one of the

³⁹ Ibid

least "bohemian" structures in the neighborhood with its "Tuscan" facade, brightly colored stucco exterior and technologically enabled panoptic paranoia (Figures 15-17) mitigating invasions from the poor. While Stanley Plaza, the mall developed by LinkREIT outlined above, capitalizes off of the informality of the original Stanley market as well as turns the imagery of desperate conditions into objects of fetishistic desire. When visiting Stanley Plaza I happened upon one of the retailers in the mall named Goods Of Desire (or G.O.D.) and on display in the window of this home accessory and kitchen retailer was an apron printed with a photograph of the infamous massing of informal tenement housing in Kowloon (Hong Kong) known as the Walled City (Figures 18-19). At its peak the Walled City was thought to be most densely populated place on earth with a population of nearly 35,000 people on approximately 2.7 hectares (290,000 square feet) comprised of nearly 300 structures informally built without a single instance of input from an architect or city planner.⁴⁰



Figure 13: Get It Clean Laundromat next to a small portion of La Boheme.

⁴⁰ For the last twenty years the Walled City (or "city of darkness" in cantonese) has been slowly dismantled through a government relocation program. An interesting account can be found here: <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1191748/kowloon-walled-city-life-city-darkness> Accessed 5/3/13.



Figure 14: Could ___ Be a Classroom? As part of *There Goes the Neighborhood 2010 I* organized a workshop in Get It Clean Laundromat that allowed participants to silkscreen shirts with a series of questions on them. Participants then used the dryers for setting the inks, giving us a site of public interface, and the laundry mat a bit of money.



Figure 15: Stucco Paranoia



Figure 16: Human zoo.

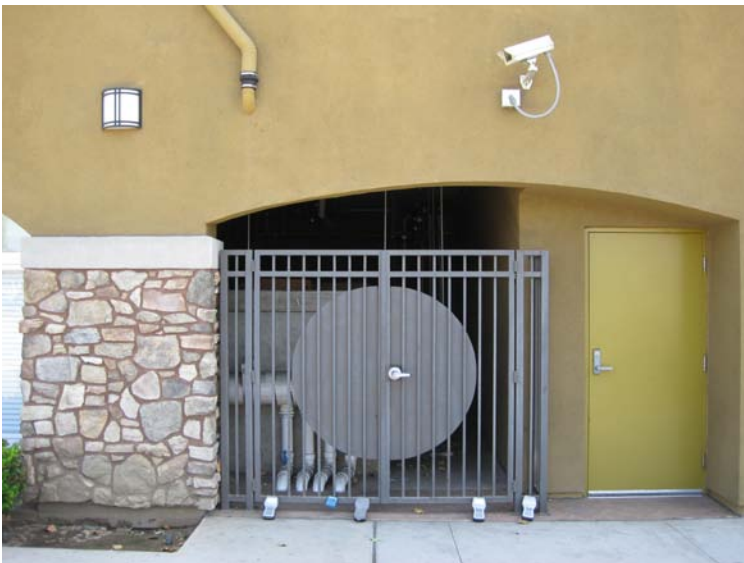


Figure 17: Gated community.



Figure 18: Walled City print on an apron in Goods of Desire (G.O.D.)



Figure 19: Apron detail

Populations exactly like the urban poor of the Walled City, as well as destitute rural workers, are the people who constitute the labor pool for factories like Foxconn. The workers living standards have been mildly improved from their lives previous to arriving at the factories and this becomes the justification for low wages, cramped living conditions and long hours of monotonous routine labor commensurate with factory life. It is factories like these that produce the Goods Of Desire that go into the malls that populate our neighborhoods displacing established cultures and localized economic potential.

What is so insidious about the above scenarios is that the majority of the actors involved are acting out of a concern for their respective communities: Mayor Cain wanted to improve the tax base of Lakewood to secure its future and Price, Jones and McGrory wanted to revitalize a struggling neighborhood, Mark Tran as a youth organizer. So embedded in the consciousness of the individuals working to produce change is a corporate capitalist ideology that no other option is able to be constituted. What is typically envisioned is that neighborhoods either allow for some form of corporate incursion, or their only other option is to wilt and die. Isn't there a third way?

CULTURE

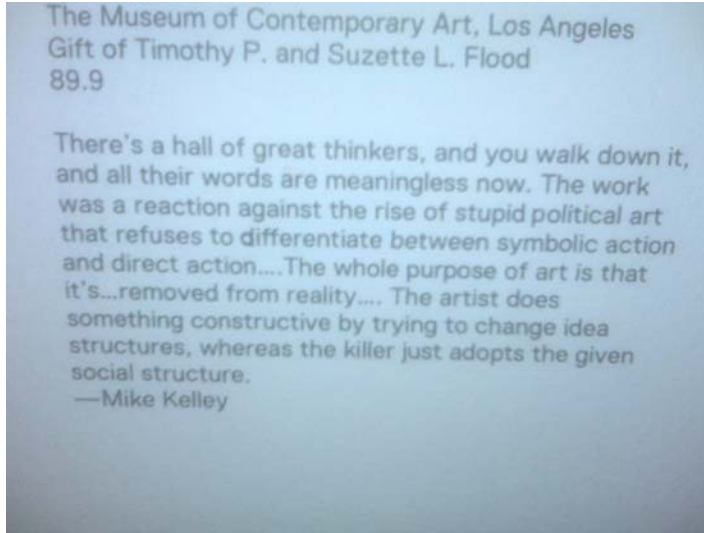


Figure 20: Pay for Your Pleasure.

The above image was taken on January 30th 2011 at 1:10pm at *The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA* and was a label for a work of art included in the exhibition "*The Artist's Museum*". The image, captured on a Blackberry mobile phone, was taken just momentarily before a museum guard intervened and stated that photography in the galleries was prohibited. To this restriction I replied that I was not taking a photo of the work, simply the label. He informed me that this action is also prohibited. This entire sequence of events took place in only a matter of moments. The labeled work of art was Mike Kelley's *Pay for Your Pleasure* (1988/2010).

Approximately three months after this micro-encounter between myself and the museum guard in Los Angeles, another event began to unfold in New York: the opening of the Marina Abramovic exhibition "The Artist is Present" at the Museum of Modern Art. This exhibition, significant for spotlighting this noted performance artist and for drawing record numbers of visitors featured the title

piece of the exhibition “The Artist is Present” as a performance piece in which Abramovich sat in a chair for eight hours a day for approximately three months during the open hours of the museum. Across from Abramovic was placed another empty chair in which museum goers could sit and stare into Abramovic’s eyes as she weathered the physical tumult of having to remain perfectly still in a deeply meditative state required of this test of endurance (Figure 21). A large contributor to the overwhelming public response to this piece was the “interactive” component of the piece in which a stream of photos were taken of visitors who sat across from Abramovic at the museum. Many of these visitors would wait for hours for a chance to sit opposite Abramovic. The photos were subsequently posted to the online image streaming website Flickr (Figure 22).



Figure 21: Abramovic (in white) performing "The Artist is Present" with a visit from actor James Franco.



Figure 22: Screen shot from Flickr. Abramovic center in red.

Several months later Abramovic participated in another event at the same institution holding ownership over the label for Kelley's "*Pay for Your Pleasure*". She was commissioned by LAMoCA to organize a piece for an annual fundraising gala titled "The Artist's Life Manifesto". Abramovic's idea for this event was to hire individuals (many students or cash strapped burgeoning young artists) to sit underneath tables at which diners *qua* donors ate. Within these tables were cut head sized holes into which the hired models placed their heads while sitting on slowly rotating platforms underneath. The models were instructed to stare at the guests and to remain stone-faced throughout the

several hours of dining. Restroom breaks for the models were also prohibited.⁴¹

In Kelley's "Pay for Your Pleasure" label photographed above he is quoted as stating that "the work was a reaction to stupid political art that refuses to differentiate between symbolic action and direct action". If the work of art that the above label is attached to is meant to "*change idea structures*" through "*symbolic action*", then how does the acceptance by the artist of the given "structure" of the institution as site of distribution for this work reflect upon the ability of the artist to cognitively "disrupt" both the direct and symbolic action of museum guard's prohibitions of documenting the label (let alone the work of art itself)? The guard's act is both direct- in the simple prohibition of photography and enforcement thereof; and symbolic- in that this prohibitive demand symbolically conveys the power, capital and labor structures that museums as institutions are dependent upon for the maintenance their distinctive positions of arbiters of cultural legitimacy. Perhaps this is precisely the point of the piece. The work points to the incongruity of context through which it is displayed and is directly alluded to in its title "Pay for Your Pleasure". Notwithstanding the original installation of the piece in 1988 in the hallway of the Renaissance Society in Chicago, the piece still conforms to a rigorous set of "what cube" conventions: the frontality of the two dimensional picture plane, a salon style installation with each image tightly adjacent to each other, the traditional materials of paper and paint, minimal rows of monochromatic color, the assumption of an architectural

⁴¹Vartanian, Hrag. "Yvonne Rainer Accuses Abramovic & MOCA of Exploiting Performers" Hyperallergic.com November 1, 2011. <http://hyperallergic.com/40242/yvonne-rainer-accuses-abramovic-moca-of-exploiting-performancers/>

corridor, and so on. The piece, as the easy re-install of the 2010 version confirms, presupposed a museological installation in its conception. This presupposition is an acceptance of a “given social structure” of the museum/gallery (white cube) context. Granted there is a philosophical “jab” at this context given the work’s context, but that jab seems self-reflexive at best and facile at worst given the aggressive policing of a spectator who was doing his best to take the time to photograph the piece with the intention of using that data as tool for the further investigation of the “idea structures” the piece is symbolically conveying. I was intrigued by the piece and wanted to actively know more. While I could have take a number of other routes in extracting this information from the label (and piece itself), doesn’t this visual approach to documentation and investigation reflect the goal of thinking outside of the standard textual/linguistic interpretations of the world at large that have been so long a goal of the avant-garde?

The question becomes: Given the networked nature of informational flows after the technological shifts of the 1990’s can and does a viewer still interact with an artwork at the atomized equation of: object -> viewer -> disinterested (disembodied) contemplation only? When viewers have mobile access to encyclopedic information while viewing a work of art, does this inhibit the work from operating as such discrete object of directed contemplation? Why is the digital image of the label that I captured with the intention of private use prohibited, while hundreds of digital images of museums goers (including the artist herself), were made publicly accessible through the sanctioned actions of

the museum in Abramovic's piece?

The philosopher Jacques Ranciere, who in his book, *The Emancipated Spectator* addresses the contingencies between, to put it simply, art which you view versus art which you do, i.e. the "passive" position of an audience member or beholder of a work of visual art and the "active" position of participatory modes of performance and visual art. When discussing the tradition of theater he says that "Theatre accuses itself of rendering spectators passive and thereby betraying its essence as a community action. It consequently assigns itself the mission of reversing its effects and expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their consciousness and their activity."⁴²

What is problematic with this formulation, according to Ranciere, is that it is the artist who ultimately remains the arbiter of the known distance is between knowledge and ignorance, activity and passivity.

Conversely, Ranciere asserts that spectators are already active in their contemplation of the world around them:

It is in this power of associating and dislocating that the emancipation of the spectator consists- that is to say, the emancipation of each of us as a spectator. Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into some activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point. Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance, secondly the distribution of roles, and thirdly the boundaries between territories.⁴³

⁴² Ranciere, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso. pg. 7.

⁴³ *Ibid.* pg. 17

Aren't both of these artists asking us to, in some sense, dismiss the "given structures" of the extended contexts in which each of these projects are presented in? Is it not "adopt[ing] the given social structure" of the overly paranoid copyright prohibitions of today's corporately modeled cultural institutions while simultaneously critiquing "direct action". Can we as spectator simply ignore the prohibitions of the museum if we "all the time link what we see to what we have seen"? If I "*all the time*" link what I see to what I have seen, then do I as a spectator, really need white wall-space of the contemporary museum to bracket this information for me?

Again leaping back across the country, we return to the other challenge to material limitations of the body as Abramovic flagellates herself the under the guise of transcendental experience for both her and the spectators at the New York MoMA. In interviews produced as online promotional videos for The Artist is Present exhibition Abramovic states that the difference between theater and Performance Art is that performance is "the moment when the performer with his own idea steps, in his own mental and physical construction, in front of the audience in a particular time. It is not theater, Theater you repeat. Theater you play somebody else. Theater is a black box. Performance is real."⁴⁴ Isn't Abramovic, by positing an egalitarian space where all spectators can sit with her and attain some sort of bodily transcendentalsal experience, imposing a particular reality that chooses to ignore the objective realities of social conditions that allow

⁴⁴ From the Museum of Modern Art, New York's website:
http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/marinaabramovic/marina_perf.html

for her to assert a position as a figure of an ontologically differentiated figure capable of inspiring transcendence in others?

It was this transcendent component of her personae, in both spirit and genre, that was asserted by Lady Gaga in an online forum in which Abramovic herself asks of Lady Gaga via email, "Who creates limits?" To which Gaga replies, "We do. We create our own limits. She [Abramovic] is a limitless human being." and continues to praise Abramovic:

She is so incredible. I went to go see her exhibit at MoMA. She is such an incredible piece of art in herself. And she is limitless.

Limitless in every way that I can't even... in my limit... raven, raden [sic] brain, that I do not possess the limitless brain that she does. I look at her and she is, um, she is so free. When she is just sitting for like three months at MoMA and she is just in a state of... nothing... of freedom. She goes somewhere else, and to be able to do that you have to be limitless.⁴⁵

As evidenced by the MoCA gala in Los Angeles this "limitlessness", apparently, still requires fundraising.

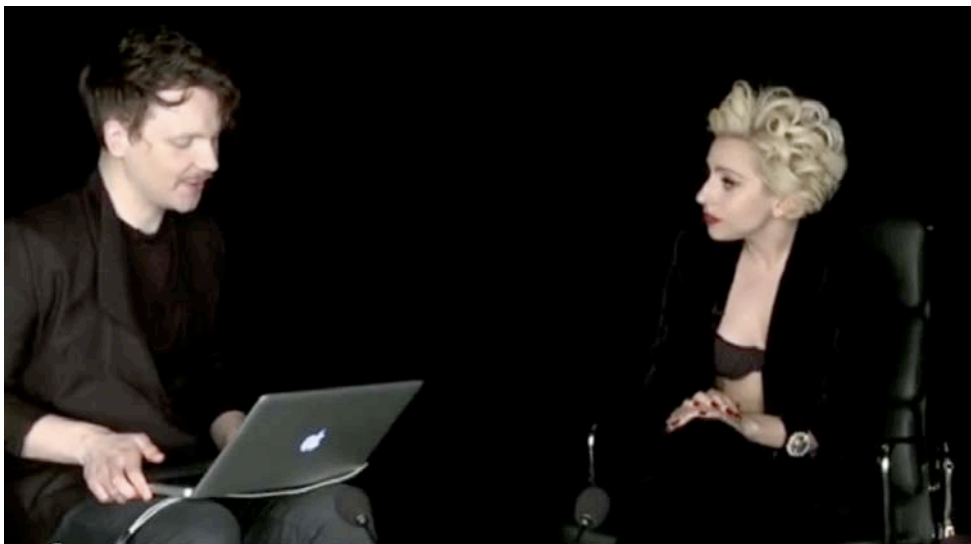


Figure 23: Lady Gaga being asked "Who creates limits?" from Marina Abramovic via email.

⁴⁵ YouTube uploaded May 30, 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY4Whayw0s>

Contemporary critical art likes to distinguish itself from other forms of art (community art, digital art, “fine” art, etc) through its ability to “change idea structures” by presenting the viewer with situations that in some way disrupt the usual flows of visual productivity in the public sphere of neo-liberal capitalism. These works so frequently take for granted the systems that they are dependent upon for their own distribution that at this stage in art history, when addressing the issue of re-inventing these channels of distribution, it is easier for us within the field of “contemporary art” to envision new paradigms for such fundamental issues of our time as immigration, global monetary policy, the collapse of the nation-state, or the end of capitalism in the content of our work as artists, before we can envision a “collapse” of the current system known as the “art world” which itself is dependent upon a form of Reaganomics in which the vast majority of capital support ultimately comes from corporate channels and in turn serves corporate hegemonic interests. Just as this text is not a critique of Abramovic’s performances as within the extended scope of her body of work as an artist or as art as such, it is an examination of how an art world “culture”, increasingly influenced by corporate funding and corporately modeled institutional structures, influences the productive outcome of individuals engaged in the field of cultural production known as “contemporary art”.

In her critique of “social practice” Claire Bishop cites “social practitioner’s” frequent rejection of the use of the words “art” or “artist”. In a talk given for Creative Time’s Living As Form exhibition (based on a essay from the catalogue) that was framed by its curator, Nato Thompson, as being focused on

“socially engaged practices that appear with increasing regularity in fields ranging from theater to activism, and urban planning to visual art”⁴⁶. Bishop states that even the use of the term “social practice” connotes a rejection of an identification by artists to refer to themselves as “artists”.

She states in regard to the term “social practice” that:

This latter term seems especially notable as “art” is dropped out of the picture in this particular phrase. All of these others are a type of art, but social practice... seems to have neutral connotations, this word “practice” is presumably to connote an ongoing life activity as in Marx’s praxis or Weber’s social action rather than the production of objects. But it also reads as a possibly self-aggrandizing way to elevate these artistic activities by implicitly comparing them to jobs that are more real and serious such law or medicine... a doctor’s practice or lawyer’s practice.⁴⁷

Bishop’s implication is that “social practitioners” tendency toward minimizing self-identification as “artists” is somehow a rejection of the historical tradition in which those artists operate. It is as if she is admonishing “social practitioners” for not being proud of their social position as “artists”. I would submit that this tendency has less to do with the rejection of the historical “artist” than it does with contemporary meaning of word “artist” in a popular sense.

What artists are rejecting is not necessarily the historical position of being an artist, but contemporary connotations associated with public perceptions of what being an artist is. While the “unpopular arts” were at one time a marginal area of cultural production that operated as a platform for unpopular ideas, the framework that artists must work in now to achieve any degree of professional

⁴⁶ <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2011/livingasform/about.htm>

⁴⁷ <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2011/livingasform/about.htm> and <http://vimeo.com/24193060>

success is more closely resembles the structures of the commercial music or film industries than as a small community of ideas subversive to those “popular arts” such as film, music, comics, videogames, and other mass media forms. The structures that art now has in parallel to these popular forms include corporate sponsorship and endorsement, a culture of V.I.P exclusivity centered around the openings of major exhibitions and biennials, the exhaustive branding of the individuals who are the artists within this system and a cult of personality that ultimately places the supreme importance on fame over innovation or socio-political impact, (or Bishop's most important criteria- aesthetics) though sustained engagement with specific communities. The fame quotient is often predicated on the romantic image of the artist as an ontologically differentiated figure within society with a capacity of accessing a unique knowledge set unattainable by those people in fields “more serious or real such as medicine or law”. Lady Gaga cites this condition responding to Abramovic’s question by praising Abramovic through a string of empty signifiers such as “free”, “in a state of... nothing”, “limitless” etc.

In other instances Bishop has stated that the autonomy lost by engaging in a socially located *productive* practice is to "miss the point ".⁴⁸ Bishop's tendency to favor disruptive practices, with a lineage to Surrealism and Dada, places disruption in position of seeming infallibility. Additionally she bemoans a loss of aesthetic criteria of analysis in social projects in favor of ethical criteria:

⁴⁸ Bishop, Claire. "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents" Artforum International. 2006.

What serious criticism has arisen in relation to socially collaborative art has been framed in a particular way: The social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism. This is manifest in a heightened attention to how a given collaboration is undertaken. In other words, artists are increasingly judged by their working process—the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration—and criticized for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to "fully" represent their subjects, as if such a thing were possible. This emphasis on process over product (i.e., means over ends) is justified as oppositional to capitalism's predilection for the contrary. The indignant outrage directed at Santiago Sierra is a prominent example of this tendency, but it has been disheartening to read the criticism of other artists that also arises in the name of this equation: Accusations of mastery and egocentrism are leveled at artists who work with participants to realize a project instead of allowing it to emerge through consensual collaboration.

Bishop's criticism of the ethical criteria attributed to "social practice" projects in favor of aesthetic criteria remains ambiguous in light of the fact that the "aesthetic" criteria with which one is to judge these projects is never clearly articulated. In another segment of Bishop's talk as part of *Living as Form* she cites, as a positive example of a disruptive practice, a project by the artist Christoph Schlingensiefel called "Please Love Austria." For this piece the artist staged a reality show like spectacle in which immigrants occupied a container for a durational period of time and were subsequently voted out by the public. The winner of this process would have been granted citizenship (through a possible volunteer marriage). Bishop says of the Schlingensiefel's performance:

A frequently heard criticism of this work is that it did not change anyone's opinion: the right-wing pensioner is still right-wing, the lefty protestors are still lefty, and so on. But this instrumentalized approach to critical judgment misunderstands the artistic force of Schlingensiefel's intervention. The point is not about "conversion," for this reduces the work of art to a question of propaganda. Rather,

Schlingensief's project draws attention to the contradictions of political discourse in Austria at that moment. The shocking fact is that Schlingensief's container caused more public agitation and distress than the presence of a real deportation center a few miles outside Vienna. The disturbing lesson of Please Love Austria is that an artistic representation of detention has more power to attract dissensus than an actual institution of detention. In fact, Schlingensief's model of "undemocratic" behavior corresponds precisely to "democracy" as practiced in reality. This contradiction is the core of Schlingensief's artistic efficacy—and it is the reason why political conversion is not the primary goal of art, why artistic representations continue to have a potency that can be harnessed to disruptive ends, and why Please Love Austria is not (and should never be seen as) morally exemplary.⁴⁹

Why is this more aesthetically adroit than any number of projects taking place in modified containers? If the degree in which the artist confused binaries, reflexively addressed mediation, caused public outcry and debate, and produced democracy through "undemocratic" means is the other criteria for exemplary aesthetics, then where does that place a provocation like that made by Jiggaboo Jones and the Compton Cookout from earlier in this text. Jones even self identifies as an artist as he and his collaborators have entered works successfully into film festivals.⁵⁰ His antics fit perfectly within the framework Bishop has outlined here and in other texts for successful disruptive art.

Yet it is difficult to see Jiggaboo Jones ever being cited as one of the exemplary artists of disruption by Bishop. With no clear criteria for aesthetic judgment what remains is either an ethical or a socially designated choice in regard to these projects. The difference between Schlingensief and Jones is that

⁴⁹ <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2011/livingasform/about.htm> and <http://vimeo.com/24193060>

⁵⁰ http://www.jiggaboojones.com/from_hooligan_to_hollywood.htm

ultimately, within a small cadre of people, we know that Schlingensiefel doesn't really mean it (wink, wink), while with Jones, the authenticity of his performance remains ambiguous, or in the very least, is only known to those within Jones immediate circle (despite the fact that Jones makes reference to the Compton Cookout and his response to the outcry as intentional provocations).

What I think gets lost in Bishop's formulations is the changing context of the "art world" itself which becomes ever more dependent on the culture of cool for its appeal to corporate sponsorship and how that cool is predicated on the spectacular display of disruptive objects. While Bishop's defense of autonomy is important, the constructs, as witnessed in the Kelley and Abramovic instances cited above point to institutional structures that are the "autonomy granting" frameworks in which artists choose to operate in. The culture within the art world has shifted from something that offered an alternative to popular consumer culture, and commercialization that goes with it, to become a "mass" industry within which the current state of these institutions could easily be described as being defined by the era of Corporate Personhood. Conversely many of the critiques levied at socially engaged practices which frequently eschew these structures (although the strategies are rapidly being absorbed into traditional institutions), often, by positioning themselves in line with practices "more serious or real such as medicine or law", hope to make substantive, direct, social change through their actions. Bishop's critique, which is a concise summation of many others (and evident in Mike Kelly's label for example) is that this expectation of concrete results places too much pressure on artists and ultimately leads to easy

co-optation and instrumentalization of what are posited as subversive works of art.

Here, I think we can define “art” not simply as the material product of the artist’s labor, but as the totality of the system of production and distribution that the artist works in. As stated in the previous section this system is supported predominantly by a creative “Reaganomics” in which most fiscal support, other than academic appointments (and in this area corporate influence is increasingly gaining ground as well), operate through a system of corporate “trickle-down” economics. This structure produces an ideology wherein both the producers and the spectator/participants reinforce the values that allow for the advantageous positions to remain structurally unchallenged. The corporate sponsor (or individual patron whose wealth is derived from a position in corporate society) give money to the non-profit arts organization who, after covering facilities and staff overhead, gives what money remains to individual artists to execute a particular project. What this leaves behind is a bifurcated system in which the support structures in the traditional art world (museums, commercial galleries and biennials etc) need to maintain a massive infrastructure of administrators, physical facilities, and high priced fundraising soirees to shore up this infrastructure; while on the other end of the spectrum is the “community arts” practitioner scrounging for every last dollar to support practices that can engage localized groups from a horizontal position; a position that quite often lacks the prestige value of being awarded monies from major cultural granting institutions and/or inclusion in major museum collections or the biennial circuit. These

community artists are then in a vulnerable position to be co-opted by corporate developers, city planners, political opportunists, and gentrifying agents.

Another option for artists is to engage in commercial activities. The obvious form of this is the commercial gallery system. The less obvious form of this would be along the lines of projects in which artists produce their work via the support of small commercial enterprises, for example Gordon Matta-Clark's Food in the 1970's or the Waffle Shop in Pittsburgh today. Given the nature of these projects as potential vehicles for (and as) artistic practices that can remain outside of the pressures of success within the art market while providing artists with a (modest) revenue stream, it is curious that projects such as these have not gained more traction, or at least critical consideration over the long term as worthwhile support structures for long term localized engagement and economic support. At this point I would like to posit that the reason this approach to art practice is not as frequently promoted or lauded in the discourse surrounding less commercial practices is precisely that allow for an independence from the power structures that support the current state of artistic production as they stand. In the same vein that any independent small business owner operating in a more equitable system of reciprocal exchange poses a threat to a corporatized system of production, so does this approach pose a threat to the current avenues of artistic production via the "non-profit" museum and increasing privatization of the university.

I raise the issue of the university here because in the realm of artistic production collegiate jobs for practicing artist have been, over the last thirty

years, a significant support structure for artists whose work may have political ramifications outside of the ideological (and commercial) mainstream, for artist of color and for women, gay and transgender artists.

A side effect of academic support structures is that it can lead to intellectual and practical isolation. Isolating ourselves within the spaces of our individualized institutions works well for engaging in fields of specialization. This approach does not bode well (given that we are addressing "social" practice) for maintaining what the sociologist Bruno Latour would describes a "sociology of associations" or "associology."⁵¹ According to Latour "the social" is not an object that can be pointed to, but rather is set of *performed* relations that must be constantly tended; or perhaps, in the terms of the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *maintained*. In 1969 Mierle Laderman Ukeles published her "Maintenance Art Manifesto" in which she outlined a practice centered on the daily drudgeries that we all spend time completing in tending to our individual lives. While we all engage in these activities on a personal level- doing taxes, taking baths, urinating, taking out the garbage - it is usually the oppressed sectors of society- people of color, women, the poor, immigrants -who end up with the jobs of maintaining public machinations that make society function smoothly for the rest of us.

While Abramovic flagellates herself with the goal of transcending corporeal limitations, Ukeles performances also often require tests of physical

⁵¹ Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005. pg. 9.

and mental endurance. Abramovic's performances work to reinforce a New Age romantic notion of the artist with a singular ability to tap into channels of knowledge inaccessible to the general population (and those segments of the population without enough leisure time to engage in durational meditative practices). Ukele's performances expose the invisible labor that allow these, and many of our performances to exist. Again utilizing Goffman's frontstage/backstage dramaturgical lens Ukele's performances expose, to put it in Goffman's terms, where:

[the] discrepancy between appearances and over-all reality may be cited. We find that there are many performances which could not have been given had not tasks been done which were physically unclean, semi-illegal, cruel, and degrading in other ways; but these disturbing facts are seldom expressed during a performance... We tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of "dirty work," whether we do this work in private or allocate it to a servant, to the impersonal market, to a legitimate specialist, or to an illegitimate one.⁵²

⁵² Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. pg. 44



Figure 24: Worker outside of the Jean Paul Gaultier exhibition at the de Young museum San Francisco.

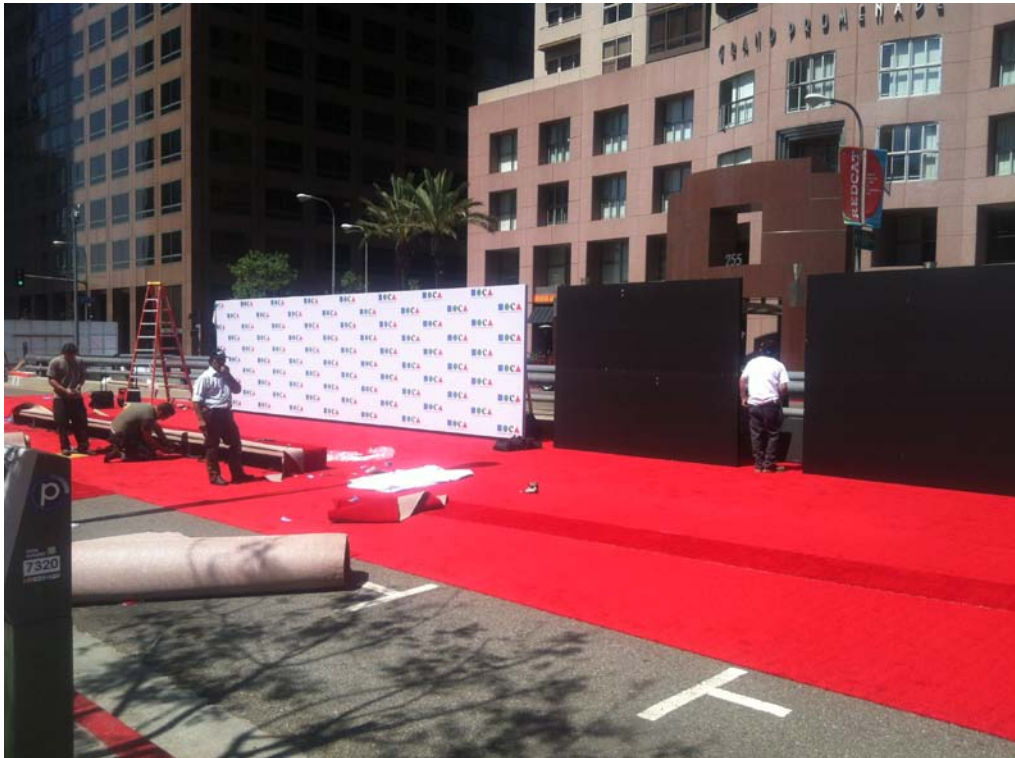


Figure 25: Preparations for a gala outside of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

Viewed in these terms it is no wonder that Abramovic is being lauded as a pioneer of Performance Art, has been awarded the major exhibition cited at the opening of this text, as well as a retrospective at the Guggenheim, and fraternizes with likes of celebrities such as James Franco and Lady Gaga. Ukeles, while considered a pioneering artist in her own right, on the other hand has been given relatively less attention as a van garde (woman) performance artist despite the fact that she and Abramovic did most of their early important performance work at roughly the same time. While Abramovic has spent recent years posing for fashion magazines, mingling with celebrities and conducting spiritually uplifting performance workshops, the latter part of Ukeles career has been spent developing usable park space and sustainable strategies as part of a team that has included engineers, designers and city officials to reclaim the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island, New York. While Ukeles' work is instrumental, it cannot be said that Abramovic's celebrity (via a persona cultivated through her art) has not been instrumentalized.

This is not to say that wariness in terms of the instrumentalization of art (or culture) is to be taken lightly via means of "social" practices. For example we can compare the rhetoric of many Social Practice artists with somebody like Harvey Seifter, the president of Seifter and Associates, a corporate consulting firm that, on its website, claims that Seifter is "One of the world's leading authorities on organizational creativity, arts-based learning and creative

ecosystems".⁵³ The firm boasts a client list that includes Ford, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Morgan Stanley, JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs. While it is reasonable to say that Seifter, a trained musician, would not be considered for any exhibitions featuring social practices as defined in contemporary art circles, rhetorically and structurally the language used by his firm closely aligns with many of the emerging conventions of social practice: an emphasis on horizontality (Seifter frequently stresses his role as director of a "conductorless orchestra"); the usefulness of art in producing extended "creativity" in "useful" vocations; art's pedagogical value; and art's use as connector in a network. As an example it may be informative to compare the language of a study conducted by Seifter and Associates of the "creative ecology" of Ulster, NY with the rhetoric of a San Diego based art and architecture collective known as The Periscope Project. From the Seifert and Associates study:

In December 2007, the Community Creativity Foundation (CCF), a newly formed Ulster County-based philanthropic enterprise, retained Seifter Associates, a New York City-based consulting firm, to conduct an environmental scan of the creative ecosystem of Ulster County and its environs.

CCF's mission is "to build and expand connections and collaborations among the cultural, educational, human service, business, wellness and spiritual communities" and "to create new opportunities for organizations to offer arts based cultural and educational programs to their local communities" with an initial focus in and around Ulster County.

Aware of the disparity between its relatively modest initial operating resources and the depth of need in the creative community, CCF believed it could maximize its impact by developing highly targeted and effective philanthropic strategies; such efforts, in turn, required

⁵³ <http://www.seifterassociates.com/about.html> Accessed 5/2/10.

a greater contextual understanding of its region's creative ecosystem. CCF selected Seifert Associates (SA) for this project based on its 15-year track record of helping businesses, governments and the non-profit sector develop creative leadership initiatives, effective organizational strategies, strong resource partnerships, and dynamic new community-based programs.⁵⁴

From The Periscope Project website:

The Periscope Project is a uniquely situated cooperative studio, exhibition, and educational space committed to the nexus of art, architecture, and regional urban issues. Plainly, Periscope consists of a core group of educators, advocates, and community members energized to progress experiments in alternative development, public education, and cultural practices as viable agents for the production of urban-spatial pedagogies.

And from their education programs:

At TPP, we believe in empowering students with skill-sets capable of recording, interpreting, and responding to complex, everyday urban experiences. Our workshops inspire students to locate themselves in respect to their city, municipal policy, and other issues of public concern. Our goal is to equip motivated students to take an active and informed role in their own communities.

We feel strongly that coming generations can create value through social innovation and micro-entrepreneurship. It is essential that we acknowledge opportunities for designing habitability and addressing missed connections between human-environmental ecologies. This happens through being here! This happens through making, questioning, and experimenting with the elements of everyday urban life.⁵⁵

The Periscope Project is an admirable initiative and this comparison should no way diminish the efforts made by its constituents as a welcome critical

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ www.periscopeproject.org <http://www.theperiscopeproject.org/> Accessed 4/17/13.

cultural position being taken in the enormously lackadaisical and apathetic fun and sun atmosphere typically found in San Diego. The point here is the rhetoric of both a corporate consulting firm and a socially engaged critical project have become so similar in tone that it points to how unconsciously corporate verbiage has seeped into alternative practices, and vice versa. In the authors modest opinion the internalization of this language again points to some of the potential pitfalls of social practice or practices that structure themselves according to institutional models as a strategy to operate outside of the standard art world paradigms. A large number of these projects position themselves as either official or unofficial organizations or micro-institutions. One could fill a veritable phone book with the number of projects initiated by cultural producers since the 1990's that have "lab", "center", "institute" or "project" in their name; or position themselves as a type of think tank.⁵⁶

This is also the legacy of corporate personhood. Not only are corporations considered people, but people (in this case artists) are beginning to conceive of themselves corporate entities, an embodiment of the ideologies perpetuated by the dominion of corporate capitalism through the increasing influence of corporate sponsorship. The economic necessities of practicing socially (and with pedagogic intentions) is that it creates an expanded financial burden via the need to provide resources useable to a participating public. While

⁵⁶ The work of sociologist Tom Medvetz on "think tanks" as institutions that are legitimized through maintaining an image of autonomy while simultaneously serving narrow interests and how "think tanks" are constituted by a network of academics, corporate funding, and policy agents is informative here. See: Medvetz Think Tanks as an Emergent Field. Social Science Research Council , October 2008.

a studio or object based artist must deal with the costs of studio space and materials, locally engaged and durational artistic practices find themselves needing classrooms, computing stations, seating, the space to accommodate this all, interns, public relations resources, web hosting and possibly becoming a 501(c) corporation and the staff to manage all of this.

While there is not the space in this current text to give a comprehensive history of "alternative spaces" it is beneficial to note the relationship that the early National Endowment for the Arts had on the rise of the "alternative space" movement after its emergence in the sixties and seventies. Alternative spaces arose out frustrations with commercial and established channels of support which were not amenable to new forms, such as conceptual art and performance, and/or art that had overtly political views that were incongruous with institutions "whose boards of trustees usually read like a list of *Who's Who* in corporate America."⁵⁷ At one point from 1971 to 1982 the budget for "Artists' Spaces rose from \$22,600 in 1971 to \$919,550 in 1982 with 170 applications submitted that year.⁵⁸ After the "culture wars" of the 1980's and 1990's public funding for these types initiatives was cut in favor of easily recognizable "high art" and tax credit private philanthropy models which have, in turn, lead the NEA to propose:

a new direction for funding in its report *American Canvas*, which would offer a new legitimacy to public culture by linking it with social programs. The report called for an increased role for arts within everyday life in local communities, that is, collaborations between local arts organizations (LAA's) and community organizations ranging from school districts to housing or social services agencies

⁵⁷Wu, Chin-tao. *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980's*. London: Verso. 2002 pg. 43

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pg 42.

to law enforcement agencies.⁵⁹

As a regional example of this same process the San Diego Foundation, a philanthropic funding organization, began an initiative in 2011 called the Creative Catalyst Fund that was intended to facilitate "opportunities for local professional artists to create new work that advances their careers and encourages civic engagement and social change in San Diego neighborhoods."⁶⁰ Because the Foundation's mandate does not allow for funds to be distributed to individuals, the funding structure ultimately requires artist to partner with sponsoring institution in the realization of the work they hope will advance their careers. What happens, then, if an artist has a practice that is intrinsically non-institutionally based? Aren't these types of funding, the NEA nationally, and San Diego Foundation locally, supposed to be there to support those practices that don't fit within traditional economic structures or conventional institutional models?

⁵⁹ Rectanus, Mark W., *Culture Incorporated: Museums, Artists, and Corporate Sponsorship*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pg. 10-11.

⁶⁰[http://www.sdfoundation.org/CivicLeadership/Programs/ArtsCulture/InnovationThroughtheArts/reativeCatalystFundIndividualArtistFellowsh.aspx](http://www.sdfoundation.org/CivicLeadership/Programs/ArtsCulture/InnovationThroughtheArts/CreativeCatalystFundIndividualArtistFellowsh.aspx)

AFTER THE REVOLUTION, WHO'S GOING TO PICK UP THE GARBAGE ON MONDAY MORNING?⁶¹

According to the second approach, adherents of the first have simply confused what they should explain with the explanation. They begin with society or other social aggregates, whereas one should end with them. They believe the social to be made essentially of social ties, whereas associations are of ties which are themselves non-social. They imagined that sociology is limited to a specific domain, whereas sociologists should travel wherever new heterogeneous associations are made. They believed the social to be always already there at their disposal, whereas the social is not a type of thing either visible or to be postulated. It is visible only by the *traces* it leaves (under trials) when a *new* association is being produced between elements which themselves are in no way 'social'.⁶²

I end with a quote taken from the Ukele's Maintenance Art Manifesto from 1969 and well as a passage from Bruno Latour's Reassembling the Social. Ukele's question is both utopian and practical. It envisages a day in which things will be radically different than they are today while simultaneously addressing the utilitarian nuances of everyday life that go unaddressed in this radical line of thinking.

Latour's passage splits this right down the middle. It is also a concise summation of how I have attempted to work over the last several years. In 2007 I founded a space called Agitprop. The goal of the space was to "blur the lines of an individual art practice, the Studio, the Gallery and the Neighborhood." It was a project in which I hoped to rethink not only my own position as an artist to the world around me, but to the institutional conditions in which artists operate. The

⁶¹ Mierle Laderman-Ukeles Maintenance Art Manifesto 1969

⁶² Latour, Bruno. Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory. pg. 8

idea was to "travel wherever new heterogeneous associations are made" and to, as much as possible use this approach to assert an autonomy through durational engagement. Some attempts are more successful than others. Below is series of images from various projects of the last several years.

While the issues outlined in this essay may seem dour, I would like to briefly return to the questions posited at the end of the section on "neighborhood": Isn't there a third way?

From what I have learned from the humble experiments that constitute my practice as it stands, the answer is a resounding yes. The third way is not only that we as artists work to maintain our autonomy but that we do so with the finest of instruments: our embodied minds as spatial agents. This means allowing for transparent slippages between the frontstage of our (visual) rhetoric and the constitution of our backstage structural conditions. While images are powerful constructs of communication (and dissensus), intelligent viewers know by being able to "all the time link what we have seen to what we have seen" what is behind the image, even if not able to articulate it verbally.

From a cultural perspective this means not allowing ourselves to fall into the trappings of intellectual and professional expediency. That we don't allow concepts such as "social practice" or "disruptive art" to become shorthand for not taking into consideration the practices of those that do not fall into our intellectual camps as valid alternatives to cognitive and material change. Change comes from both challenging provocations and solidarities made through active assemblies. That we don't mistake placing ourselves in "new heterogeneous"

situations of contention with the benefits bestowed by professional opportunism as acceptable "readymade" contradictions.

Neighborhoods change quickly. What I have learned from my time as the operator of an "alternative space" in North Park is that active invisibility can be a powerful tool for a cultural agent. An image of propriety gives one a seat at the table, even if the property (literally) has holes in it. This seat at the table of civic development could be considered one of the dirty, arduous tasks as cited by Ukeles. These backstage gestures need to be made public. Public-ness is not located, rather performed and enacted; site is one of the myriad of actors.

Place informs education. I have learned a tremendous amount from being in a place and conversing with another body: "Reason is more an accomplishment of inquiry than a pre-given fact or capacity."



Figure 26: For the last six years the majority of my work has been executed through a project called Agitprop. Agitprop is an "art institution" performed in urban space. With an intentionally small physical infrastructure, the focus of the project is programming and connectivity through participatory models of production.



Figure 27: Internally, the space hosts a myriad of cultural events connecting with other individuals and communities in the neighborhood. These range from performances to installations, to garage sales, to talks, to brunches, to acting as a staging area for projects in the city at large.



Figure 28: Agitprop re-imagines the form of the gallery as tool for engaging a particular locality over an extended period of time. It works as meeting place and connector between local agents and institutions with the ultimate outcome being the triangulation of resources between sites of engagement (the neighborhood); sites of historical context and display (cultural institutions) and sites of research and pedagogy (the university). These connections are made public through multi-media collaborative productions and interventions.



Figure 29: The following projects have evolved out of this strategy.



Figure 30: Art Tap Out mixes underground pugilism and art criticism to create an open forum for debate around issues raised by various works of art. I play the orchestrator and referee between artist and critic. The audience may chime in at any time. Absurd Theater to enhance public debate.

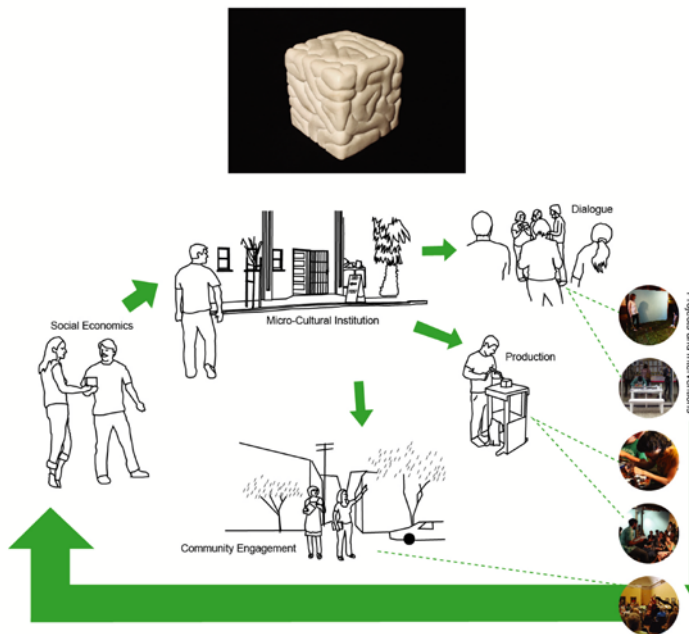


Figure 31: The Brain Trust is a project that works both as a real time, materialized, diagram of "social economics", as well as a support structure for Agitprop projects. Through the critical appropriation of corporate practices investors buy "Brain Block" shares. Stock Market and Art Market equate: as we succeed the value of the Brain Trustee's Blocks go up. The volume of the individual block is roughly the equivalent to that of the human brain.

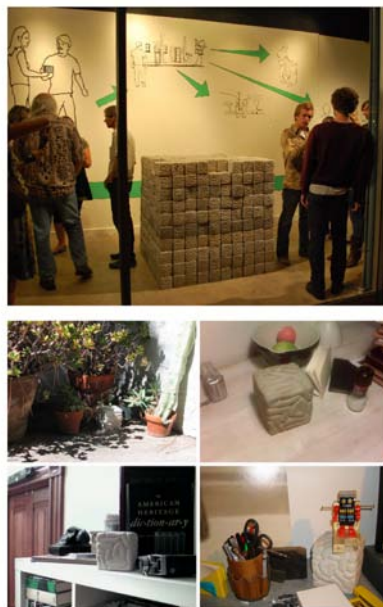


Figure 32: As Brain Blocks are sold the modernist cube gets broken down. The Blocks become distributed conversation pieces through which the owners can describe the project and process of the Brain Trust.



Figure 33: In Search of Transcendence is based on a walk through Balboa Park, San Diego's "Central Park". What should be a pedestrian's paradise is in actuality a dangerous trek complete with four lane highways, angry golfers and prohibitions at every turn. Pastoral imagery rebukes bodily engagement.



Figure 34: In Search of Transcendence. Photo-documentation accompanied by a narrative text.



Capitalism Works for Me, Steve Lambert



Get Mad at Sin, Andrew Dirwiddie



Agitprop Reading at SDMA, John Pluecker and Omar Pimenta



Yes Men

Figure 35: Summer Salon Series: In 2010 I was asked by the San Diego Museum of Art to help establish and co-curate the Summer Salon Series. The goal of the series was to open up the museum as a site of dialogue and debate through weekly performances, talks, films and installations; and use the collection of this encyclopedic museum to contextualize the works in the collection with contemporary issues, and vice versa.



Figure 36: There Goes the Neighborhood is a four day event that took place in North Park (San Diego) and surrounding neighborhoods. For the first iteration we focused on issues of gentrification and displacement. Through collaborations between artists, small businesses, local residents, political figures and institutions the neighborhood becomes a temporary "cultural institution" and space of critical dialogue. Projects ranged from an opera in the alley behind La Boheme, to a silkscreen workshop in a laundromat. This iteration took place June 3-6, 2010.

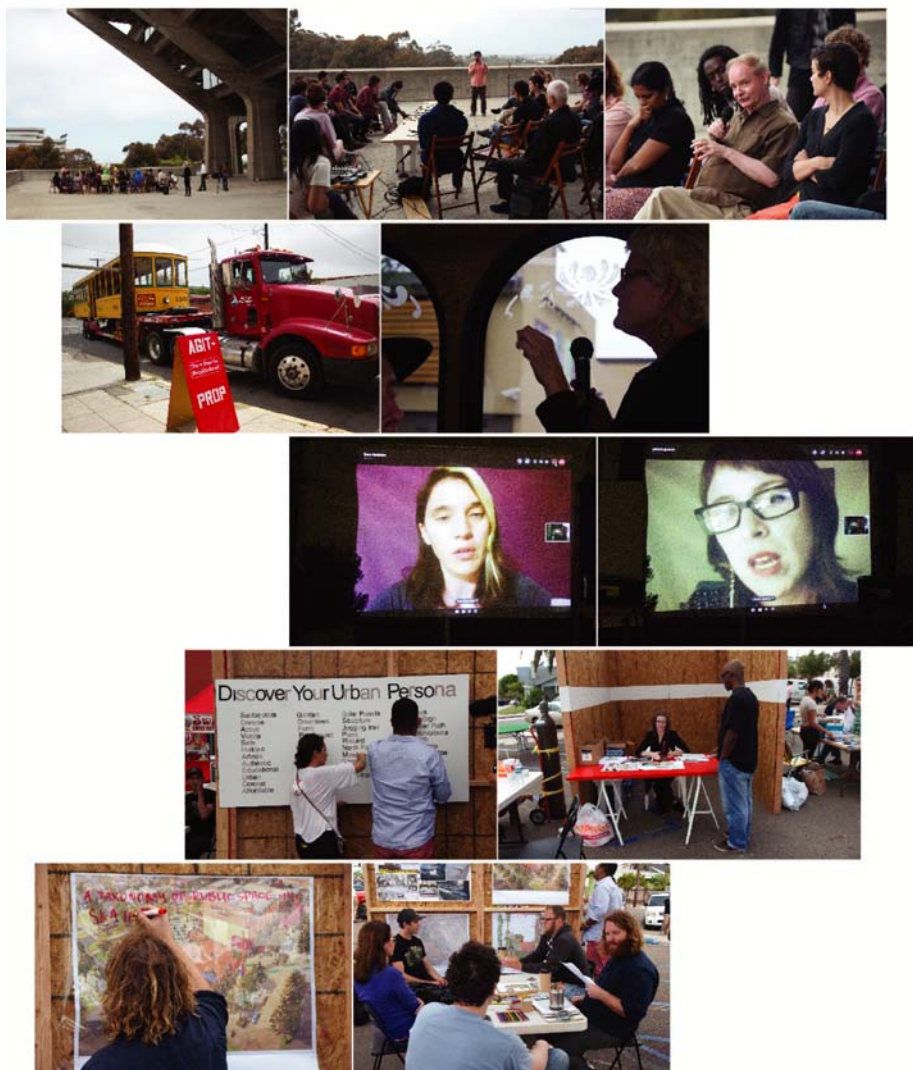


Figure 37: There Goes the Neighborhood 2012 was a second iteration of the event. Projects included: Re-running defunct streetcars on the formerly existing routes (with tours given by neighborhood stakeholders); a proposal to relocate a university adjacent to more socio-economically diverse communities; Skype "postcards" with artists/activists from around the country; and workshops to challenge the city of San Diego's design of a proposed local park. May 31-June 3, 2012.



Figure 38: Critical Postcards are publicly held Skype conversations with artists/activists from around the country whose work addresses issues of public engagement and urban policy and perceptions. The goal of the conversations is to dispersal of strategies for local residents and advocacy groups to appropriate.



Speakers included: Beryl Forman, El Cajon Boulevard B.I.A.; Xavier Leonard, Multi-media Artist; Leslie Ryan, Landscape Architect; Randy Van Vleck, Active Transportation Planner & Advocate

Figure 39: As part of There Goes the Neighborhood 2012, I conceptualized re-running replica tour cars along what were actual early twentieth century streetcar routes in San Diego (with original streetcar in tow). Instead of the usual tourist trap sites, we took a route into some of San Diego's more overlooked neighborhoods. Speakers scheduled for this project included an array of community activists.



Figure 40: Relocating A University, part of There Goes the Neighborhood 2012, proposed that the University of California, San Diego be relocated closer to downtown and adjacent communities (currently located in La Jolla- a suburb with one of the highest median home prices in the nation). A sculpture was built as conversation starter placing scale models of UCSD buildings onto a proposed parcel land to emphasize (hypothetical) feasibility. Several talks and town halls were held on this topic.



Figure 41: The Third Party consists of a mobile interview cart that can be placed in front of various works of art in a museum. Various iterations have invited neighborhood residents adjacent to the Agitprop space, urban activists and cultural critics, artists and audience members to converse on their respective topics. The works of art become the starting point for the conversations.



Figure 42: Enabling Neighborhoods was a project in which I partnered with a group looking to start a supportive non-profit for adults with developmental disabilities that uses "asset mappin" in client's respective communities to facilitate independent living. An "office" was installed as an incubator space for the group to connect with people that may have some knowledge that could assist in establishing the non-profit.