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'WORKING IN PUBLIC SEMINARS' PROJECT

SEMINAR ONE

-

Aesthetics and Ethics of Working in Public

Proceedings extracted from the project website – https://www.workinginpublicseminars.org

Introduction – Suzanne Lacy

I was asked to say a little something about why I had decided to come here. I am an academic and an artist and a writer, and live in California. Many years ago I convened several artists and curators to develop a text called '*Mapping the Terrain*' and subsequent to that time, I have done a lot of writing. I wanted the opportunity to stop and reflect on where my practice had taken me since that period of time and I decided I would like to think about the Oakland projects. The Oakland Projects are a series over ten years on the subject of teenagers. I worked with teenagers, artists, activists and organisational people as well as four institutions: Health, Criminal Justice, Public Policy and City Council and Education. When we began, like all artists, we intuited our way forward. The work got more and more complicated; and before you knew it, our analysis took us into significant engagement with the public sphere in Oakland.

We accomplished many things through this work. We helped to get the youth policy developed and passed by City Council, one that dedicates about $100,000 a year to youth activities. We helped support, and were the recipients of, a funding process called *Kids First* where youth give grants to other youth. It was not all success. A Police Chief's Youth Advisory Group fell apart within a year.

Throughout these ten years, there were probably a hundred people I worked with, not to mention the kids themselves. Some of the kids (not all of them) grew up with me and with this team of a hundred people who would come in and out of the projects. It is hard to talk and write about the complex texture of relationships that come into being over ten years in this kind of project There was on-going mentorship of youth, and the youth themselves who grew up to continue youth development or political work. It is also hard to talk about whether that is an artwork or not part of an artwork.

I thought it would be very interesting to take the time and reflect with you here in Scotland and in the UK in general. As I've been coming back and forth here for many years, I've seen how much more developed the dialogue is here around these sorts of issues. I realised it is complicated by issues of the effect of public funding. That is part of what we will be exploring together.

For me it is an opportunity to reflect and to read. With my two thesis advisers, Anne Douglas and Grant Kester, I'm probably the luckiest person getting a PhD right now. The reading however, was not enough, and we came up with the idea (and this is, I think, part of Anne's invention) of generating a learning environment as part of a research process. I decided that to look at my learning as it is reflected by professionals in the field here, people whose practice can inform mine. Your learning in the seminar will teach me and, potentially, my projects will teach you. Through your reflection on these projects and how they relate to your work, hopefully we will engage in a dialogic process that we will further – not so much my own research--but where we are going as a field.

I was asked to say a couple of things about the Oakland Projects that are not really evident when you read about them in a book or looked at the video. Most of these projects were based on an analysis of the way in which the image of young people operates in California's public culture. The reason California is significant (that is California's urban areas) is that it is probably the most diverse state in our country, has the largest economy, and seems to be the place where issues like division of wealth, immigration, population growth among Latinos, etc., are being played out. It is where most of the prisons are being built. It is where the schools have gone from being among the top of the country to the lowest.

These projects provide an opportunity for me, at least and, hopefully, for you all, to look at what is happening to youth in an urban environment and to consider whether, or to what extent, an art project can support youth development or community development.

My question continues to be - How do you describe this work? How do you represent it, and how do you understand whether or not it is as effective or functional as you'd like it to be? And then, does it operate as quality art? What is quality in this context?

I want to thank Anne and Carole and my colleague, Reiko Goto, and many of you here tonight, also consider colleagues in this field. Thank you so much for coming. I'm looking forward to this. Oh! I forgot to introduce Grant! Here's

something I just found out about him, though we've known each other for a while. Grant was working in non-profit and writing criticism when he decided to go back to school and get his PhD. He went to a renowned grad program in the area of theory. I was impressed – often people who are successful in academia have little experience in the non-profit sector in our area. With his pedigree -- both working in non-profits, writing in the field and his understanding of theory, along with a predilection to look closely at artists work, it seems like an unbeatable combination. I think a lot of us in the field really appreciate the thinking that Grant is doing – the kind of openness of his approach and his interest in the process details and the implications of our work. He is one of the few people who I think bridge a deep understanding of activist practice as it actually takes place within a community and the sometimes esoteric world of theory. For those of us who know him well, we particularly appreciate his nasty sense of humour!

Grant Kester: Ok, thank you Suzanne. I'll try and focus on the hubris and keep the nastiness to it a reasonable level and thank you also to Carole, Anne and Reiko. It's good to see a number of you guys tonight who I have known from past trips.

It is my first time in Scotland, but I've been to Northern Ireland and Ireland and England quite a number of times. What we are going to do tonight is some work that comes out of the current book project that I'm working on called '*The One and the Many*'. It looks at contemporary collaborative and collective art practices.

Wazungu means "White Men": Superflex and the Limits of Ethical Capitalism

1. Globalization and Neoliberalism

> For all globalization's benefits, all the talk of friendship, the Americans count their dividends at home, the British count theirs—and we count ours. The majority count their losses. So when they tell us that sovereignty is outdated, as is the nation-state, we should ask ourselves what they are up to.
>
> Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Chief of Staff of the President of the Russian Federation, 2006[1]

The experience of "Globalism" is typically framed in terms of rupture and dislocation, entailing the emergence of new categories of subjectivity, new modes of social interaction, new configurations of political power, unprecedented movements of populations, and technological transformations that break radically with the past. There is, of course, nothing particularly novel in this. For every breathless account of "immaterial labor," "precarity," migrating multitudes and the utopian powers of the internet we can identify numerous historical precedents (the self-aggrandizing claims of the emergent "Professional Managerial Class" in the early twentieth century, immigrant "homework" in the tenements of New York City, or the democratizing promises made for rail expansion or rural electrification, for example). The very claim that globalism is somehow new or unique is entirely traditional: part of a well-established script in which rupture and dislocation play a central role. If the analysis of modernity has a signal intellectual trait it would seem to be a persistent historical amnesia, and the desire to claim that this moment of transformation, the one through which we are currently living, is somehow more decisive, more extreme, more symptomatic, than any before it.

It is the capacity to describe, diagnose, or envision this ostensible change, to be the "early adopter," so to speak, the creative consumer possessing a privileged insight into this rupture, that has consistently defined the modern artist and intellectual. The act of "naming" a new epoch or its constituent elements (the nominative impulse so evident in Hardt and Negri's work, for example) carries with it an almost irresistible attraction, functioning as it does to legitimate the theorist's own cultural necessity.

I'd argue instead for preserving a sense of historical continuity in analyzing the current cultural situation, while remaining attentive to specific, localized transformations in the social fabric. In this talk I'll examine the intersection between globalization and contemporary art production, with a specific focus on collaborative, socially engaged art practices. I want to begin by substituting the term "neoliberalism" for globalism. The analysis of globalism or globalization has tended to concentrate on its spatial characteristics, due in part to the role played by urban geographers such as David Harvey in its original articulation. I want to focus instead on the discursive system of neo-liberalism: the way in which it constitutes and curtails collective and individual identity and action. From its origins in the work of Chicago School economists under the influence of Friedrich von Hayek, neoliberalism has emerged as the new "common sense" of global development. One of its chief effects has been the strategic reassertion of a nineteenth century model of subjectivity in which success or failure in the market system is the primary determinant of self-worth. Within this model, a parasitic "dependence" on state or public institutions is a sign of moral depravity, marking

the absence of the entrepreneurial drive necessary to survive in the market

system. Neoliberal economic theory provided an effective ideological template for

expanding capital in the post-WWII period. It has been mobilized in conjunction

with certain strategic shifts in the projection of corporate power: the increasing

centralization of control by trans-national financial and managerial elites, the

spatial segregation of production, which works to disempower and disaggregate

labor, and the ongoing erosion of the state's capacity to impose any significant

regulatory limits on corporate interests.

These processes have been germinating for decades, with offshore

sourcing beginning in the late 1950s, and the contraction of the state's regulatory

and ameliorative role in the US beginning with the backlash against Community

Action Programs in the late 1960s, and continuing through Richard Nixon's "New

Federalism" initiatives in the early '70s. A parallel process occurred in England

under Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s, and is ongoing today in the EU as

member nations are under increasing pressure to shed social provisions such as

free health care, and subsidized housing and higher education. One of the

primary cultural goals of neo-liberalism is to erode the autonomy of public

institutions, which are seen to represent a collective interest or space of

articulation that is potentially resistant to the privatizing drive of the market

system. In practice, this has entailed an assault on all forms of collectivity or

solidarity that challenge the imperatives of capital, aside from ideologically

compliant forms of organized religion. The effect has been to collapse or confuse

a number of the salient distinctions through which cultural resistance has

conventionally been defined: private vs. public interest, individual vs. collective action, and so on.

2. Recoding Autonomy

In this context, the proliferation of contemporary art practices concerned with building new social networks and crafting new forms of collective social interaction can be seen as the expression of a political struggle to re-think collectivity against the grain of a diminishing public sphere. Thus the emergence of these practices marks a cyclical shift *within* the field of art (towards process-based, participatory work), even as the nature of this shift involves a re-articulation of aesthetic autonomy and an increasing permeability *between* 'art' and other zones of symbolic production (activism, radical social work, environmentalism, participatory planning, etc.). I will argue that aesthetic autonomy, as it's been traditionally understood, is being re-coded or renegotiated in these projects. As we all know, the core function of art changes quite dramatically in the modern period. As early as the mid-nineteenth-century art began to abandon it's traditional function of transmitting and idealizing dominant forms of power, whether religious or secular, and instead took on the role of disrupting or destabilizing them. This agonistic posture changes art's self-understanding, its ontology, if you will, as well as the kinds of knowledge that it produces. First, modern art begins to define itself in opposition to, or as the negation of, certain characteristics identified with the dominant culture. Early on this "other" was provided by academic painting and later it became consumer

culture. By the post-WWII period contemporary art was sufficiently institutionalized and capitalized that it's survival was no longer at stake. The previously externalized threat represented by the salon or kitsch was internalized in anxieties about the proliferation of rogue tendencies within contemporary art itself.[2] This approach lends itself to a hygienic attitude on the part of the critic, who must defend art from contamination: a fear that art will lose its specific identity if it becomes too permeable to other, impure, areas of culture.

The second feature of this agonistic model involves art's relationship to the viewer. The appropriate response to the work of art is no longer veneration or obeisance, but discomfort, rupture or an uncanny derangement of the senses. I've written about this elsewhere in terms of an "orthopedic" model of the aesthetic in which art seeks to improve the cognitive or perceptual capacities of the viewer, who is constructed as always, already in need of correction. These provocations often perform an affirmative function; verifying the pre-existing self-image of art world audiences. Or they are consumed rhetorically, as the viewer identifies, in a self-congratulatory manner, with the subject position of the artist rather than the hapless implied viewer. In fact, one comes to the space of art prepared for precisely this sort of provocation; disruption is, in a way, expected and even savored. This coincides with what I term a "textual" model of art production, based in part on the rapprochement between neo-conceptual art strategies and poststructuralist theory in the 1990s.[3] Here the work of art functions as a hermeneutic device intended to destabilize fixed oppositions via some form of embodied conceptual provocation. Importantly, the work, whether

it's a painting, installation or event, is conceived by the artist beforehand and subsequently set in place before the viewer. While there is certainly an interactive dimension to even the most opaque or static art work the "interaction" involved in textual production is understood primarily in terms of either contemplative decoding or sensory derangement.

We are witnessing today a certain disenchantment with the existing parameters of avant-garde art and an attempt to rearticulate the specificity of the aesthetic in relationship to both the viewer and to other cultural, and political, practices. Groups such as Les Huit Facettes Interaction in Senegal, NICA in Myanmar, Navjot Altaf in India, Ala Plastica in Argentina, and countless others, are involved with a more or less conscious effort to renegotiate the condition of art's autonomy, and to shape a new paradigm. In place of the either/or mentality of the traditional avant-garde, which defines art through antithetical negation (art is not activism, not ethnography, not popular culture) we encounter a relation of reciprocal elucidation relative to other fields of political and cultural action. And in place of a textual paradigm we discover practices centered on immersive interaction and a reactive, referential orientation to specific sites of social exchange and interaction. We can get some sense of this shift in the work of the German group Park Fiction, in the creation of an alternative park in Hamburg's gentrifying harbor front or "Hafenstrase" area. The project was complicated by the militant history of the area, which was the site of a long-term occupation during the 1980s, when local residents took control of housing in the area and fended off attacks by the German police. A traditional avant-garde approach

would preclude any direct involvement in this context. While art can encourage a critically self-reflexive contemplation of the political situation, the argument might go, it's forbidden from open participation in the circuits of political and economic power that structure the development process itself.

The members of Park Fiction didn't sequester themselves from the political scene of the Hafenstrase, but they didn't fully collapse the separation between the aesthetic and the political either. They operated through a principle of what I term *adjacency*. That is, they worked adjacent to or alongside political systems through a whimsical re-enactment of planning that nevertheless had a pragmatic effect. They didn't begin by assuming an agonistic or adversarial position based on direct confrontation: marching in the streets or territorializing space, naming an enemy. Instead, they operated through the dislocation of the political through the cultural, organizing a series of party-like participatory planning sessions in which the Hafenstrase's residents sketched out their wishes and dreams regarding the potential use of the space (which was otherwise slated for a condominium development). They didn't come onto the scene and announce their intention to fight real-estate developers or challenge private property, but their work ultimately had that effect in taking control of the land on which the park currently sits. They accomplished this through a very subtle understanding of the relative permeability of the cultural and the political, as they touch on and interact with each other. As Park Fiction argued, in the Hafenstrasse "art and politics made each other more clever." This work was actualized precisely *because* the city's power structure, knowing the history of

the area, recognized that the threat of civil disorder lay just beneath the surface. The park thus possesses a dual character. On the one hand the city no doubt saw it as a way to buy off the Hafenstrasse community with a cultural "amenity". At the same time, the park provides a physical expression of the resident's solidarity through its collective ownership and ongoing use.

Fig.1 Park Fiction in Hafenstrasse, Hamburg (Photo: Grant Kester)

3. *Supergas* and *Guaraná Power*

These practices raise a number of relevant questions: what is the specific

orientation of "art" outside of art institutional settings? What metric do we use in

analyzing this work? Most importantly, what forms of knowledge are generated in

the intersection between art discourse and other, parallel, systems of action?

One of the most complex zones of contact occurs in the relationship between

collective art practice and models of organization drawn from the corporate

world. I'm not referring here to the largely ironic appropriation of corporate

language or branding techniques evident in projects by the Yes Men, Etoy and

others. Rather, I'm interested in groups that openly, albeit ambivalently, embrace

market-based behavior and values. This is a connection rendered all the more

problematic by the canniness with which neo-liberal managerial theory has

appropriated models of creativity, innovation and structural organization

ostensibly drawn from the arts.[4] The Danish group Superflex provides a useful

case study of these issues through their endorsement of "ethical capitalism" in

projects such as *Supergas* in Tanzania and *Guaraná Power* in Brazil. In the

Supergas project Superflex worked with engineers and a sustainable agriculture

organization in Tanzania to develop and market an affordable biogas generator

to African farmers. The biogas unit turns human and animal waste into a gas fuel

source. In *Guaraná Power* Superflex worked with a group of Guaraná berry

farmers in Brazil to develop and market an energy drink to recapture some of the

profits currently taken by the multinational beverage corporations that purchase

their crops. Each functions as a kind of pilot project, with the expressed hope of

some wider replication: there have been (halting) attempts to market the biogas generator in other countries, and the Guaraná Power group has arranged for limited distribution of their drink. However, both projects have received their primary public exposure and legitimation in art venues and before art audiences.[5]

There isn't space here to fully explore the implications these projects have for contemporary art practice. I want to focus instead on a single, and apparently ancillary, aspect of Superflex's work: their vexed relationship to the protocols of non-governmental aid agencies. On the one hand, the *Supergas* and *Guaraná Power* projects have clear affinities with the operation of NGOs: the members of Superflex work with "disenfranchised" communities and seek to ameliorate their condition through locally-situated interventions. They operate with the implicit understanding that they have something to offer these communities; new machinery, intellectual technology, or modes of social organization or subjectivity, which can help the disempowered improve their situation. In fact, images of Superflex's members assisting Tanzanian's with the creation of a test digester remind me of nothing so much as earnest young Peace Corps volunteers spreading western technological "know how" through the developing world in the 1960s and '70s. Despite their somewhat labored efforts at tongue-in-check staging, which seem intended primarily for art world consumption, they are apparently sincere in their "mission" as emissaries of the developed world.[6] Of course the encouragement of grower's cooperatives or the circulation of new technologies among poor farmers is being carried forward in a virtually identical manner by literally hundreds of NGOs and aid agencies, as well as corporations,

around the world. Danida, the Danish International Development Agency, has

funded numerous projects organized along similar lines throughout Africa.

Despite the obvious corollaries, Superflex's members have been extremely

concerned to differentiate their work from the operations of nonprofit aid

organizations in interviews. This ostensible difference is an article of faith in most

sympathetic reviews as well (the quotes below are taken from articles available

on the Superflex website).

> In order not to become involved in existing (power) structures in Danish
> government controlled development aid, Superflex is working to have their
> biogas project funded by companies and private and public foundations and
> funds. Superflex is thus accelerating a situation dramatically and effectively
> being a complex combination of art activism, "ethical" capitalism, and new
> development of ecological technology.
>
> —Lars Bang Larsen, "Superflex: Art and Biogas" (*Siksi*, 1997)
>
> We don't want to help the way an aid organization does. Instead we offer a
> functional product that they are able to use on their own terms. . . The goal of
> the "donors" in the classical aid-giving scenario is to raise the quality of life
> among the "recipients" by providing a road, a school or some other amenity.
> Quality of life is, however, measured by Western or European values and
> norms and does not always work in a new context. . . Many Africans talk
> about wanting to kick out all aid organizations, saying that they make their
> society passively dependent on the "helper's" contributions. They undermine
> creativity and initiative and thereby create victimized people.
>
> —An Exchange Between Åsa Nacking and Superflex (*Afterall*, 1998)
>
> This confrontation demonstrates a clear difference between the objectives of
> the Superflex project and development aid: a functional product is offered for
> which an actual need has been identified and available resources (dung) are
> used. The argument here is not a social one, but rather an issue of
> economics. . . Superflex thus distances itself from the traditional
> donor/recipient relation in which the latter becomes passively dependent on
> contributions, stifling creativity and initiative.
>
> —Barbara Steiner, "Radical Democracy, Acknowledging the Complexities and
> Contingencies" (August 1999)

As I've described it, the negative ontology of traditional avant-garde art is based on difference from an implicitly inferior dominant cultural form. This gesture entails, of course, a certain violence; the disparaged "other" against which advanced art defines itself, is necessarily reified; a caricature whose unalloyed simplicity or instrumentality justifies the complexity and ludic freedom of art as somehow unique and necessary. I suspect Superflex's almost instinctual effort to distance itself from the clearly analogous operations of aid organizations is motivated in part by this same tradition. Their ability to take up an adjudicatory, critically-reflexive relationship to the operations of NGOs is precisely what define's their practice as "art". In order to produce this distance, Superflex, in what they apparently believe is a refreshingly non-conformist rejection of received wisdom, embrace the concept of "ethical capitalism".[7] Where NGOs make recipients "dependent," stifle "creativity and initiative," and inculcate a passive "victim" mentality, the market system makes them independent and entrepreneurial. Where NGOs force recipients to conform to western values rather than meeting their real needs, the market gives people "functional products" that they can use "on their own terms."[8]

Curiously, this same uncompromising criticality does not extend to Superflex's understanding of the market itself as a parallel organizational model. Instead, "market standards" remain a naturalized given which they accept more or less at face value. "We have always been oriented towards the market," according to Rasmus Nielsen, "We want our projects to be able to function

according to market standards. It is not because we think corporations are particularly sympathetic, but rather, out of an attempt to avoid the giver-receiver relationship established by NGOs." Superflex attaches a particular importance to the act of *selling* the biogas digester to Tanzanians, thereby implicating them in a market-based transaction which will ignite their entreprenurial spirit. The ameliorative effects of the cash nexus are evident in a cartoon created to publicize the *Supergas* project. The cartoon features a proud villager bragging to a friend about the virtues of his biogas digester. "Where did you get that technology?" the friend asks. "I got it from Superflex's 'Wazungu' [white men]," he replies. "But this 'Wazungu,' they must be very rich and clever. How come they know our problems and work hard to help us solve them?," his friend inquires. "Oh! You boy," he responds, "'Wazungu' are not helping us, but we are helping each other. . . I paid for this technology you see." NGOs practice a patronizing cultural superiority, but the "giver-receiver" relationship established by the market is refreshingly free of humanist cant and pretension. The market is an ideologically neutral device which artists can easily appropriate and turn to their own ends. Hence we have the unintentionally ironic sight of a group of Danish artists whose education and art practice have been subsidized by one of the most generous welfare states in the EU, working to encourage "entrepreneurial" independence among poor Africans; generously giving them the tools to "empower" themselves and overcome their "victimization" by Western aid agencies. The cause of African poverty isn't the damaging economic "reforms" imposed by the World Bank, disproportionate debt, lack of resources or

kleptocratic government, but rather, an absence of "creativity" and "initiative" among the African people rendered passive and dependent by a surfeit of health clinics and water pumps.

The critique of "dependency" among aid recipients is, of course, straight from the neo-liberal playbook (it reiterates neoconservative attacks on state welfare provision in the US during the 1980s by figures such as William Bennett). Aid, for all it's problems, encourages a form of reciprocal obligation between state entities and the poor that violates the moral economy of the workplace and the private market. With their appeals to "ethical" capitalism and the glories of "entrepreneurial" subjectivity, Superflex only manage to differentiate themselves from Danida by aligning themselves with Starbucks, whose support of "Fair Trade" initiatives is widely-publicized. Superflex attempt to triangulate a critical perspectrive on NGOs and development dependency through the vehicle of market-based forms of social organization which are themselves deeply problematic. In an interview with Åsa Nacking they associate their approach with Muhammad Yunus's "Grameen Bank" system of micro-credit in India, describing the Grameen system as a "virus" circulating among the poor that "provides the tools to enable a poor person to change his condition." "All humans are potential entreprenuers," they enthuse, speculating on the positive effects that would follow if the poor were given access to the same financial "tools" as the developing world.

Despite it's reputation, the Grameen Bank system has resulted in incidents of aggression and even violence in rural villages over loan repayment.

Alex Counts, president of the Grameen Foundation USA, acknowledges that the micro-credit model has "a dark side. . . It brought a lot of solidarity but also brought an enormous amount of tension. If someone fell behind, people got very tense and even got hostile with each other."[9] By displacing conventional direct aid, the Grameen system increased debt entrapment among poor rural women who are forced to repay loans at interest rates of up to 36%. "The poor are exploiting the poor," as Dr. Shudhirendar Sharma of the Dehli Ecological Foundation writes.[10] Notably, the micro-credit "market" has now attracted the attention of Citibank and other global financial conglomerates. This isn't to disregard the positive impact of the Grammen Bank system, but simply to acknowledge it's necessary ambivalence and it's explicit alignment with the discourse of neo-liberalism, and to question Superflex's simplistic contrast between the always, already compromised operations of the non-profit sector and the ostensibly untroubled procedures of ethical capitalism. Ethical capitalism implies the assimilation of a resistance to the mandates of capital within capitalism itself through a kind of self-policing. It functions on two levels. First, through a quasi-socialization of risk via subsidized or simulacral versions of market tools (the Grameen Bank system relies, in fact, on NGO funding to remain solvent), and second, through a reduction of ethical claims to largely procedural forms of "transparency" and self-disclosure. Here ethics becomes a form of cultural capital. The necessary cost of doing business in a global world is to *appear* ethical so as to not disturb the fragile sensibilities of your customers in privileged countries. The first assumes that the poor need to be gradually

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weaned from their collectivist traditions and inoculated with the entreprenurial

virus. The second is merely cover for business as usual. Neither are without

problems, and neither is any less ethically compromised or less prone to the

projection of western desires, than the work of the typical aid agency.

The *Guarana Power* project helps to complicate this analysis further. In

the *Guarana Power* project Superflex worked with a collective of Brazilan

Guarana berry farmers who were being pressured by beverage corporations

such as Pepsi and AmBev to lower their prices. The result of their collaboration

was a new energy drink (*Guarana Power*) that has so far received limited

distribution (primarily at the opening of art exhibitions by Superflex). The bottle

features the *Guarana Power* logo superimposed over the label of AmBev's

competing *Antartica* brand. While discussions of this project in the artworld have

focused primarily on issues of intellectual property and trade-mark infringement,

it also suggests some of the constraints posed by Superflex's embrace of

"ethical" capitalism. Neither Superflex nor the berry farmers have access to the

capital, production facilities or distribution networks necessary for their drink

business to become self-sustaining in market terms. In fact they are already in

direct competition with a number of other locally-produced, "fair trade," Guarana-

based drinks (*Mondo Guarana* and *Steaz: The First Fair Trade Energy Drink*)

being produced with equally altruistic motives, but a somewhat stronger grasp of

market fundamentals. In fact, the idea for the drink itself (and of consumption as

a kind of surrogate form of political engagement or "empowerment) was taken

from *Mecca Cola*, which is marketed by a French company that devotes a

precentage of it's profits to Palestinian charities (their slogan is: "Don't drink stupid, drink with committment"). The *Guarana Power* project exhibits a certain ambivalence. While the (arguably naive) attempt to compete with multinational beverage corporations may well constitute a poetic or symbolic gesture of resistance, it is likely to do little to improve the bargaining position of the Guarana farmers relative to Pepsi and AmBev (an instructive comparision could be made here with Grennan and Sperandio's "worker-designed" candy bar in *We Got It!*, which was part of Mary Jane Jacobs' "Culture in Action" exhibition in Chicago in 1993). Further, the project reinforces the perception (quite popular in "Free Trade" circles) of the global market as a demanding but essentially equitable field of action, in which a small but entreprenurial band of individuals can stake their claim with little more than a good idea and the sweat of their brows.

As I've already suggested, the projects of Superflex raise a number of timely questions regarding the changing modalities of resistance and assimilation in contemporary art. A substantive analysis of this work requires a critical metrology capable of tracing the subtle calibration of ironic distance and sincere engagement, the movement and counter-movement of ideological pressures, as these projects orient themselves within a complex and rapidly changing political moment. They also reveal some of the symptomatic tensions within contemporary art practices that operate within, against, and adjacent to development agencies, NGOs, and other quasi-public institutions. What relationship does the artist take up relative to these institutions? Ironic distanciation? Adjudicatory critique? Sympathetic cooperation? The ambivalent

character of Superflex's work is emblematic of these tensions. Are they simply reinforcing neo-liberal orthodoxy, or exposing the contradictions of the "soft cops" of developmental aid? Are they building bold new models of social interaction or merely recruiting incipient capitalists, in a kind of perverse, globalized version of Junior Achievement? The very terms here suggest some of the limits of this practice, as they consistently define Superflex's collaborators in behavioralist terms. How, in fact, does this critical or cooptive economy relate to the needs and experience of their local collaborators? And at what levels of meaning does the work still operate as an art practice? For myself, the most interesting part of the *Supergas* project isn't it's earnest critique of NGO "dependency" (a critique which was acknowledged and debated within the aid community long before Superflex discovered it), but the particular effects of collaborative interaction itself; the habitus of shared labor and it's relationship to new models of collectivity. This dimension of the work is generally treated as incidental or merely pragmatic in most accounts of the work. A more thorough account of this work must proceed dialectically, tracing the interrelationship between the situational protocols of collaboration and the constraints imposed by the discursive horizon of neo-liberalism.

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[1] Michael Specter, "Kremlin, Inc.," *The New Yorker*, January 29, 2007, p.59.

[2] See "Duration, Performativity and Critique" in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[3] Here we might consider the parallel's between Clement Greenberg's notion of formal "movement" in the development of avant-garde art (as the sublimated expression of a currently unrealizable political "movement") with the ethical normalization of textual "play" in the poetics of Roland Barthes (which would exercise a significant influence through the canonization of poststructuralist theory in European and American art schools during the 1990s). In each case, the perceived impossibility of substantive political change (blocked by the rise of fascism in Greenberg's case and the failure of May '68 for Barthes) necessitates withdrawal into a zone of formal/textual autonomy that must be protected from the pragmatic demands of "real world" politics. Each proceeds via a conservational displacement or deferral of political critique into a more abstracted critique of epistemology *per se*, evident in Greenberg's attack on "representational" art and Barthes' attack on conventional forms of "signification".

[4] See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).

[5] Venues include Redcat gallery at the Disney/Cal Arts Theater in Los Angeles, the Venice Biennale, the Herning Kunstmuseum, and the Arken Museum of Modern Art in Denmark.

[6] "Their African clothing, for example, was based on the idea of combining the look of an engineer, a practical social worker, and the kind of uniforms preferred by imperialist armies." Barbara Steiner, "Radical Democracy: Acknowledging the Complexities and Contingencies" (August 1999). http://www.superflex.net/text/articles/acknowledging.shtml

[7] The English author Richard North offers the following "propositions" on ethical capitalism, from a talk at London's Institute of Contemporary Art in 2002.

> 1. Good is done by firms involved in cigarettes, animal research facilities, oil, chemicals, landfills, drink, pornography, 'sweatshops," and flowers grown in the tropics. Much less good is done by organics, windmills, 'fair' trade suppliers, 'development' NGOs.

> 2. It is a matter of debate what production systems and goods and services produce good, so it pays us to remember that describing CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility] or ethical business is contested territory. Firms going for 'corporate social responsibility" can much more easily achieve political correctness than real good.

> 3. NGOs do not have a monopoly on understanding virtue. NGOs are romantic, idealist and propagandist. The public, media and corporations have been unwise to sub-contract so much ethical thinking to them.

4. Firms, instead of claiming to be 'ethical", should say they are catering to a particular fashion, taste or market sector. The owners, managers and staff may share that taste, but they should remember that there will be others who, perhaps rightly, think them fools.

5. Ethics is like politics. I believe in the market as a force for good in rather the way a Conservative might think that self-reliance is good for the poor; I believe 'leftist' reform often does damage. Similar cases can be made for capitalism 'red in tooth and claw' vs. 'Third Way' capitalism incorporating an NGO agenda.

North, whose most recent book is *Let's Scrap the BBC: Ten Years to set Broadcasters Free,* is affiliated by the Social Affairs Unit, a London-based "charity" whose other recent publications include an apologia for the slave trade. See: http://www.richarddnorth.com/10_propositions/ethical_capitalism.htm

[8] Here is Superflex, from an interview with Åsa Nacking:

Yes, the [Biogas] project may be seen as a utopia for a specific group of users, namely the African family. We do not wish to impose a prevailing ideology on people—the families are perfectly free to choose. Nor is the Biogas project a gift. We might compare it to a western family buying a car, they will usually only do so if they need one and if their finances allow. We are interested in the opportunity that the Biogas system presents for the individual families. They now have more time to do something else but gather firewood. Inherent in it is an opportunity for productivity, even if we have no definite proof that this will follow.

Åsa Nacking, "An Exchange between Åsa Nacking and Superflex," *Afterall*, issue 0 (1998). Http://www.superflex.net/text/articles/an_exchange_between.shtml

Superflex's embrace of market-based "solutions" and the cultivation of an "entrepreneurial" spirit among their Tanzanian collaborators is rendered all the more problematic because Tanzania was one of the first African nations to be subjected to forced "structural adjustment" policies by the IMF and World Bank, as early as 1979, resulting in growing social tension over the resulting economic and class divisions. See Michael Chege, "The Return of Multiparty Politics," in *Beyond Capitalism vs. Socialism in Tanzania and Kenya*, Joel D. Barkan, editor (London, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), pp.47-74.

[9] See Laxmi Murthy, "Banking on Poor Women: Grameen Bank," *Infochange India News*, accessed on April 15, 2007. http://www.infochangeindia.org/microc_article2.jsp. See also Susan F. Feiner and Drucilla K. Barker, "Microcredit and Women's Poverty: Granting this year's

Nobel Peace Prize to microcredit guru Muhammad Yunus affirms neoliberalism," *Dollars and Senses*, November/December 2006.

[10] Interview with Dr. Sudhirendar Sharma, "Micro-credit improves cash flow but doesn't create wealth," *Infochange India News*, accessed on April 16, 2007 http://www.infochangeindia.org/microc_article5.jsp. A recent essay by Jaya Sharma of Nirantar, a Delhi-based women's resource center, describes some of the drawbacks of the micro-credit system. It's worth quoting at length:

> Banks enjoy higher rates of return than they could ever dream of getting from individual men or corporations due to extremely low transaction costs, since poor women undertake the role of pressurising each other to repay. Corporations gain easy access to vast rural markets with micro-credit-based women's collectives serving both as consumers and sellers of their products. Donors find a route to ensuring self-sustainability of NGOs they support since a share of the often higher-than-market rate of interest being charged to the women goes to the NGOs managing micro-credit interventions. Several studies draw attention to the rise in women's indebtedness as a result of back-to-back lending, higher incidence of violence in the event of women being unable to bring into the family the credit that is expected of them, and the tremendous pressure on women to repay which can compel them to migrate. There have even been reported instances of defaulting women being imprisoned. The most popular model of micro credit in India is that of self-help groups (SHGs). A qualitative study of SHG interventions in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat undertaken by Nirantar. . . offers insights into the micro-credit phenomenon through voices of women who are part of SHGs. A district-level official linked to a national level SHG programme sponsored by the ministry of rural development explained why the programme focused on women. "Women cannot go anywhere, they can be located easily; they cannot run away leaving their homes; they can be easily persuaded to repay as they feel shame more quickly and consider non-repayment as a betrayal of family honour".

Sharma also points to the political implication of the shift from subsidy as a right (evident in the reduction or elimination of agricultural subsidies) and it's replacement by the financial burden of credit. Jaya Sharma, "Grameen Myth," *The Times of India* (Bombay), November 6, 2006.

Guest lecture questions and answers

1. "I would be interested to hear a little bit more about what you mean by adjacency"
- Ed Carroll, City Art Centre Dublin

Ed Carroll: I have not heard you speak about the principle of adjacency before. That was something new for me. It seems to be a new issue of discussion that is emerging from your new book, *'One and the Many'*. I would be interested to hear a little bit more about what you mean by that. I'm thinking of this as an arts organisation that often tries to work adjacent to non-traditional groups: community workers, youth workers. I have the sense that sometimes the people that you would normally sit adjacent to their art centres or arts organisations, often move away from you a little bit and youth workers or community workers seem to move in. So, I'm just wondering, is that sort of contextualisation of adjacency, does it fit that type of notion?

Grant Kester: Yes, it's funny you mention that because one of the things that started me thinking about this concept was my visit with CityArts in Dublin last fall. Specifically, it was some of the conversations we had about the intersections between youth work, social work and art practice. There is a really productive relationship between those areas that is worth exploring. I developed this in part because I got frustrated with the tendency in a lot of criticism to argue that the second a work starts to involve itself with the operations of these disciplines (social work, youth work, etc.), it's compromised in some way. Certainly this work can lead to problematic transactions, but I don't find them any more or less problematic than the transactions that take place at the Tate, the Serpentine or the Venice Biennale.

Of course, the key is figuring out how to maintain a degree of autonomy and independence, and a critical perspective. But it's also important not to lapse into this moral entrepreneurship of always looking at other areas of practice as the ones that need to be fixed or corrected. What I find so interesting about the Superflex project is that when I actually talked to members of Danish NGOs they were very reflective about the limits of what they do. They want to have a conversation. They are well aware of the dependency critique: it goes back fifteen years. It has often been my experience that when I actually talk to practitioners in other fields, they are, as you can imagine, thoughtful reflective people. Why is the default response of artists to people working in parallel ways so often one of judgement and correction rather than conversation?

The other example of adjacency that I thought about was the work of Helen and Newton Harrison. I am working on a book project on Helen and Newton right now. I've spent a lot of time talking to them and some of their interlocutors. Their relationship to science is very different from that of other artists who are working in the art-science interface. They really see their work as overlapping with aspects of scientific research, not as an overt critique of the same old monolithic, straw man of instrumentalizing science. There is a productive domain between those two areas. So they have conversations with scientists or environmental planners or ecological activists. It's a conciliatory dialogue. It doesn't immediately default to pointing out the obvious fact that scientific research is compromised by corporate values, or that the environmental movement has subscribed to essentialism in the past. It's fairly easy to do that.

My feeling is not to put down the portcullis right away, and instead to say, 'Let me look at what's going on in these exchanges. Can I learn something?' Rather than coming on the scene and chastising artists for working with scientists, or activist or youth workers, I'm trying to be a little more open. Maybe there are some new forms of insight, new forms of knowledge production that are taking place in those interstitial relationships.

Suzanne Lacy: So, how do you account for the closed system, the protectivism that exists in contemporary art with respect to "life-like" art? Why do you think there is so much critical effort to defend it? Does it have to do with professionalism of arts? Does it have to do with the market?

Grant Kester: I'm not really sure about that – that's a good question.

Roxanna Meechan (core group) Could it be about a specific justification for actually being there, for example, where a general community worker or an artist arrives into an environment? They might have been paid or they will be paid, so they have a reason to why they are there.

Suzanne Lacy: Not in every country in the world…

Roxanna Meechan: Will you ever say, "Sorry, thank you for the offer. Here are my expenses but I don't want to get paid because there is nothing that I can do here." The process is about negotiation. But, what can I do for you? What can you do for me? If you find that is nothing, why hang around? I don't know.

2. "What qualifies these transactions as art in your view?"
- Kerstin Mey, University of Ulster

Kerstin Mey (core group): I would be interested to know whether you think these transactions that Superflex engaged in would necessarily have to be described within an art domain at all, or whether it isn't the art institutional framework that provides a validation mechanism for that kind of practice for want of another mechanism – as there are perhaps no other outlets at that current moment in time that would validate these kind of engagements. What qualifies these transactions as art in your view? Is it the specific production or is a qualifier located within the area of discourse and institutional structures?

Grant Kester: There are two ways to respond to that. One is the more philosophical response, which would be too tedious. The pragmatic response makes note of the fact that there is a range (a vast range, really) of artists and groups working around the globe in this manner and insisting that their practice is an *art* practice. They come from backgrounds in art practice and were educated by and large as artists, yet they work in these interstitial ways. So, as a critic and a theorist, my tendency has been to accept that claim and see where the thought experiment leads me. I think that is ok because I think (perhaps naïvely and as I tried to outline in my talk), there is a kind of shift going on in the self-understanding of art. This, of course, is in the very nature of modern art – to regularly undergo the process of standing outside its prior condition and reflecting back on it, before moving again in some new trajectory. Let's think of some examples: In the early 1930s, when the Dadaists were distributing AIZ (*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeiting* or *Workers Illustrated News* of the German Communist Party) on a plinth, walking through the streets of Berlin in funeral coats doing performance art about the death of the German bourgeoisie – was that art or creative advertising? Or, when Tatlin was designing gliders, was that art or engineering? Did it matter?

During these transition moments, these hinge moments if you will, you see a proliferation of border-crossing like that. Art displays a certain porosity or permeability. It becomes open to other areas of practice and so, the projects I tend to be attracted to, just on a level of personal passion and commitment, are often located in those boundary zones. Part of the anxiety that this work produces for critics who are more closely identified with the mainstream art world is, of course, understandable. This comes back to Suzanne's question. There are a lot of people in the art world and art history departments, journal editors and so on who are invested in particular genealogies and particular versions of the history of the avant-garde. When art practices emerge in the contemporary scene that seem to deviate from this canon, or it's core assumptions about the work of art, audience, and so on, they tend to produce a sacrificial response ("*this* isn't art") or an impulse towards domestication.

I also think this work produces some anxiety because of the issue of ethics. I will give you an example: I discussed some of this work (not these projects in particular, but related work) at a very prestigious art institution and there was a small audience of academics and people that were of the cultural intelligentsia, so to speak. There was one senior individual associated with historiography of experimental film. As I was describing the projects, he became more and more visibly agitated. I was not trying to sell anybody on this work, I was simply describing it. But the mere description of this practice as art seemed to produce a kind of gag reflex, like the abject in Kristeva.

I have encountered that with a lot with people, that this is a bridge too far; I cannot accept *this* as art. In a history of modern art that is nothing if not an accumulation of transgressive acts, it is interesting to me which boundaries we are encouraged to cross and which we are policed.

I think that this work provokes anxiety because it seems to overtly acknowledge the ethical nature of art. Ethics is the hidden secret of modernism. In the teeth of incipient modernity we celebrate the non-instrumental and non-rational, we define the imagination as the domain of a liberating play; we privilege forms of pre-industrial labour; whatever it might be. These are all profoundly ethical gestures, but I think this aspect of modernism is seen by some as an embarrassment. There is a certain decorum that one must follow in which you acknowledge the ethical only obliquely.

This dynamic goes back to Schiller, if not earlier. Schiller begins life as a populist poet. He wants to reach the new German reading public but unfortunately he can't sell his poetry. It's only after his failure to reach the public that you see a kind of sea-change in his writing about art. It's at this stage, around the time of his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, that he begins to denounce the average reader who wants to go to the library and check out romance novels and ghost stories and is unprepared, in a way, for the gift of advanced art. As a result, art must remain aloof from the average reader. It must give the public not what it wants but what it *needs*.

All of these ideas about the need to sequester the work of art, the autonomy of the aesthetic and the adjudicatory relationship to non-specialist viewers are really set in place quite early on. This is two centuries ago – but these ideas are clearly evident in very contemporary criticism, which is anxious about socially-engaged art. It has been a very effective tradition because there is reason to be anxious about appropriation and co-optation by all kinds of forces: advertising, and propaganda, and so on, but it's also exerted a very conservative effect on contemporary art criticism and theory.

What is particularly promising about work that is being produced right now, is that you see a kind of relinquishing of that reflex in practitioners – and younger practitioners, all over the place, in South America, South East Asia, in Europe etc. At the same time, it is clearly linked to a longer tradition that goes back 30 years or more. It is evident in Suzanne's work, or Helen and Newton's work, among many others working globally.

3. "Platform spun off a micro-hydro business as a result of exploring the water in London – Why is that achievement more readily discussed? Is it too functional?"
- Chris Fremantle, Independent Arts Consultant

Chris Fremantle: I just wanted to offer something up that reinforces that point. I do some work with Platform down in London, the social and ecological arts organisation. They, through their water projects in London exploring the very rivers of London, spun off a micro-hydro business which now employs 20 people and turns over several hundred thousand pounds a year delivering micro-renewable solutions to homes and schools and businesses in London. I keep saying why don't we talk about that more? That's a remarkable achievement for a small arts organisation. I don't know whether it isn't trumpeted around more because of that instinct that, maybe, it is too functional; it is not oblique enough.

Grant Kester: Yes and no. That is a really interesting example. I knew about that project. But, you see, I never heard that the turbine was replicated.

Chris Fremantle: It starts with the idea that you can take a third-world micro-turbine and use it in the first world in London to create energy to run a music room in a school. It spins off into business.

Grant Kester: That's interesting, yes.

4. "Are artists agents of cultural resistance or critical practitioners?"
- Stephen Gray, Aberdeenshire Council

Steven Gray: You seem to have come full circle. When you started off you were telling us about the rise of neoliberalism and artists as agents of cultural resistance. Then you moved into the sphere of artists as being judge/jury of their own work and other people's or other artists' work. Is that the direction you are following at the moment? Are there two camps or is there a permeable membrane between the two sides?

Grant Kester: Yes, that's a good question. I suppose what is rewarding about the work I'm writing about is that there is such a range of practices. I'm looking at some projects in Latin America currently, including Grupo Etcetera, who are active in Argentina. They are closely connected with activists who have attempted to overcome the historical amnesia there regarding the junta and the disappearances. They began by creating fake street signs around the homes of the complicit doctors and military people who were still living anonymously in Buenos Aires. Instead of 'stop' or 'left turn', their signs would say 'Here a torturer lives, 100 feet on the right'. Eventually they were forced to remove those. Then they started these diversionary street performances because the police would come and try and drive them away from

the houses. It led to a fascinating kind of back-and-forth performative exchange between the street protesters and the police, and their attempts to name and mark these buildings.

At the same time, there are other projects that are not nearly as connected to activism in that more direct, political sense. They define the political differently. What is interesting is the range of that practice. It is important to attend to it as a continuum and to understand that there are certain methodologies that link them, but that there are also certain differences. That's why, in the book, I'm trying to contextualize each practice, to say, 'In this context, this group has situated itself in this way', 'This orientation produces these effects,' etc. So, some of the projects are much more connected to political protest than others. But for me, that's fine. I'm comfortable with that diversity, yes.

5. "How do you compare the development process and the results of art?"
- Keith Donnelly. South Lanarkshire Council

Keith Donnelly (Core Group): I would like to go back to the first example that you showed, which is the German group, Park Fiction. I think there is almost a juxtaposition between the group themselves, the development process as art and the result. How do you compare these? Do you strictly look at two separate art practices going on there – in terms of the design and the object or is the outcome an integral part of the art delivery?

Grant Kester: So one practice would be the process that led up to the creation, and then the second would be the form that the creation took, the particular configuration of elements and how they were designed, and so on?

Keith Donnelly: Yes, I'm interested in how one assesses that in terms of art forms. Are they two distinct aspects sitting in parallel to one another, or can there be a cross-reference between the two?

Grant Kester: That's a really good question. I don't know if I have an answer for that and I have to think about that, to be honest. I have tended to focus on the process, rather than the product, since this is the area that is least developed in current critical writing. There is a corollary, for example, between, say, the form the process took and the traditions of what we call participatory planning in the US, which is an area of architectural practice that has long been regarded as naïve or retrograde by the architectural theory establishment. I think for a long time that the participatory planning approach was kind of the poor sibling of "real" architecture. Aside from the focusing on that history, I don't know! It's something I want to think about in this book, but I haven't been able to work it out yet, so thank you for that.

6. "What is art and what is not art? What might be art?"
- Ruth Barker, Glasgow based artist and writer

Ruth Barker (core group): I was really interested to hear you talking about that kind of negative ontology of art – that art is the thing that it is not exactly anything else. It's not social work; it's not city planning. It was making me think of Kosuth and *Art after Philosophy* where he defines this art 'condition' in terms of what is art and what is not art, and what is it that is not art that might be art. I'm interested in the significance to this discourse of the idea of the conversation, or of the discursive or of the dialectical. [Laugh] In ten words!

Grant Kester: Yes! As it relates to conversation – yes – I have to think about that. Maybe I can come at this question from the issue of duration. The duration issue is interesting to me because there is a paucity of resources in the canonical sources of art theory, which are primarily drawn from a post-structuralist tradition. That tradition places such a heavy emphasis on simultaneity – on immediacy. All you have to do is consider the ways in which this tradition writes about May '68 as a singular, epoch-making event. In these accounts May '68 was unplanned, uncoordinated, spontaneous, it happened in a moment, there was an attempt to elude rational thought or political calculation, etc., etc. That's been a very strong tradition. We see that replicated in Jean-Luc Nancy's work and a lot of other places, more recently. It stems from a discomfort with temporally extensive interaction and the transformative effect that durational experience can produce. It lends itself to a quasi-religious model of the transformation of thought or self as epiphany, like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus struck down in an instant. You see this in all sorts of places, even Michael Fried's work when he talks about art as a state of grace, for example.

There is so little in the way of a theoretical framework to talk about duration and time as anything other than chronology, history, narrative with a beginning, and a middle and an end; fixity, predictability and so on. When we try to address duration from the point of view of art practice it's very difficult to come up with a language. It is something I'm struggling with, actually, for this book – which is why I can't actually answer you directly, but it is something that I am pre-occupied with.

It also has to do with rethinking models of cognition, I suppose. I'm trying to develop a concept of labour, not in the Lockean sense of externalising your will in the transformation of the natural world, or even in the Marxist sense, but labour as a kind of co-labouring of bodies together in space. There is something about the proximity of bodies in space – the haptic register of that experience – that I consider important. The traditions of European art history and theory impose a dividing line between modernism or advanced European art and pre-modern, especially non-European art traditions. Riegl defines this as the shift from the haptic to the visual. We go from those pre-modern cultures that were so ontologically insecure they had to touch everything, to hold onto it, to the Renaissance and the 'triumph' of distanced, detached perspectival mastery. So much of the way the history of art is written, involves a privileging of the optical over the haptic. One of the things I'm trying to work out is how haptic or bodily experience, outside the domain of vision, functions to produce knowledge of the world. There isn't really a language for me to talk about that in art theory and criticism, so I'm trying to cobble something together.

7. "When do artistic interventions run the risk of aestheticising dissent and create the risk of an indignity of speaking for others?"
- Adele Patrick, Womens' Library, Glasgow

Adele Patrick (core group): I just want to return to the model of Park Fiction for a moment. I want to ask a little bit more about the ethics involved in what seems to be a form of aestheticisation of dissent that is taking place in this particular type of setting. Maybe there is not an answer to this, or maybe there are people in the room who have their own perspective on this.

Grant Kester: What? The aestheticisation of the dissent?

Adele Patrick: Yes, the forms of dissent. How might you speak about the agency of a group that calls itself 'Park Fiction' in relation to these other residents in this particular setting? They are almost authoring of forms of dissent and claiming it simultaneously as art. There seems to be a lot of tension in this kind of project between acting outside of the power of the planner or the power of the corporates within a group that is, in itself, speaking on behalf of another group. I'm not familiar with this project, but it may well be the case that there has been some sort of negotiation, some sort of consensus, absolute consensus within this group. But, nevertheless, we were speaking there about children's participation and minority ethnic groups and so forth.

I feel there are problems in the conflating an individual artist and artists' groups with the notion of the community in terms of how that plays out in the longer term. Is there an absolutely wonderful Holy Grail of how we get new communities generated in a really fantastic way. I'm just a little bit anxious about that. What do you have to say about that?

Grant Kester: Yes, this is a criticism that I actually developed in the evangelical aesthetics essay about 15 years ago, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's work in Aesthetic Evangelists: the Rhetoric of Empowerment and Conversion in contemporary Community Art *Afterimage* (January 1995). It involves what Bourdieu calls 'the fetish of the delegate', or what Foucault describes as 'the indignity of speaking for others'. This is a necessary point of tension in a lot of these practices. For what it is worth, in terms of framing Park Fiction, the members have lived and worked in the Hafenstrasse for years and were not seen as outsiders to that community. From what I understand it's not a community that you could walk into and impose your will on very easily – as an artist. You don't want to slip into some sort of vulgarized Gramsci-ian notion of the 'organic intellectual' since every community is bifurcated, divided and discontinuous and no one can claim a wholly unproblematic authority as it's representative. What I find in the most productive work is an acknowledgement of the ethical dilemma of delegation in speaking and the delineation of community. But it's also necessary to recognize that you can never fully purify discourse in that way, ethically purify it. Maybe Suzanne can talk about this.

8. "Who speaks for whom, where?"
- Suzanne Lacy

Suzanne Lacy: I have two thoughts about that. One is in terms of the people I work with. To presume that it would be possible for one artist to manipulate 400 people or so (unless they are under the age of maybe eight) seems to take their power away from them.

The second question is - Who speaks for whom, where? Are we talking about speaking in front of the City Council? That requires a particular kind of voice. Speaking in a museum? That's another kind of voice; on radio is another kind of voice. I think each one of those forms of presentation suggests different needs, including authenticity, communication styles, and so on. In a collaboration, many different kinds of people represent the same ideas in different places and in different ways, and speak from the vantage of differing authority. It is important, in these forms of criticism, that the complexity of the issue is investigated. By the way, they have those problems outside of the arts as well, in radical politics for instance where groups are always talking about who the spokesperson is, about who got on the radio and who became the public figure? Who can get through to the mayor?

Recently I was speaking at the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles with Judy Chicago. I've known her for 30 years and it's interesting to watch the kind of evolution she's made into a kind of an unabashed public figure. She represents, and is willing to represent to a broad range of people, important perspectives on feminism and art. Most people in this kind of practice are not as interested in being public figures. They don't necessarily put themselves out front when other participants in the project can represent the issues in different, perhaps better ways.

Grant Kester: They tend to be quite reluctant, as you say.

Suzanne Lacy: There's a community organising strategy that was developed in the 70's by Saul Alinsky that many people seem to follow. Basically, these were strategies of developing grass roots leadership, empowering other people. In our case we had youth leadership teams and taught some students how to write letters to the editors, press releases, and speak on television. For example, the artist might speak in the art world, but not in front of City Council. You don't tend to find the artist speaking everywhere in the community. It is not the nature of this type of work. For one thing, people figure it out really quickly if you are there for self-aggrandizement and they stop coming along for the ride.

Grant Kester: This is a great question; it is just not an easy one to answer. I'm trying to study group processes in the civil rights movement, because that is an important precedent, especially in the U.S. There's a great book called *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* by Francesca Polletta, an historian at Columbia University. She interviewed a lot of the early civil rights movement participants and paid close attention to their protocols and decision-making processes, and questions of representation and delegation. There were significant schisms within the movement around this issue between Quakers, pacifists, the SNCC, etc. She studied some of the tensions that existed between the demand to be pragmatically effective and the need to preserve a kind of cultural model of self-organization and non-hierarchical decision-making. It's a fascinating thing to try to work through.

9. "Does Levinas' notion of the unforeseen, the indefinable or unpredictable as an ethical event, fit into this type of artwork?"
- Brian Grassom, artist and post-doctoral researcher

Brian Grassom: My question touches on the previous question but one (Ruth Barker). Paraphrasing Adorno, he said that art is defined in relation to what is not. I'm thinking of that indefinability or unpredictability that seems to inhabit art. There seems to be something that comes spontaneously, and we don't really know where it comes from. We may be speaking of the unconscious. I believe you've written about Levinas in one of your books. How does the 'event', which Levinas defines as unforeseen and ethical in itself, fit into some of the models that you've shown us tonight? Does it have a place?

Grant Kester: Yes, it's a good question. Badiou's work on 'event' reiterates this to some extent. It is a very productive concept, going back at least to Georges Sorel's notion of the 'act'. What I find most useful about that as a framework, is the idea of 'event' as a moment at which consciousness is radically transformed, that causes one to move outside of self. What does Adorno say in *Aesthetic Theory*? In a section called *Black as an Ideal*, he argues that blackness or opacity is the ideal form of art because black absorbs meaning, it resists it and holds the viewer at arms' length. The work of art must forestall understanding by constituting itself as a series of cognitive or perceptual baffles that prevent

the viewer from grasping it. The cognitive will of the viewer will be frustrated, and in that act of frustration, the viewer becomes self-conscious of their own conatus, their own drive to possess and know, and they will be in a way chastised for it. In an entire culture of semantic promiscuity, art will remain the one domain that withholds 'easy' meaning; that defers or challenges your totalizing desire to grasp and know the world. For Adorno that is how you provoke movement outside of self.

This is a very venerable tradition in the history of the avant garde. I would simply contend that there are other ways to transform consciousness, and this goes back to the issue of duration. There are ways in which consciousness can be transformed that do not have to rely on a kind of chastisement or refusal of the viewer, but instead an opening up to the viewer. Another approach is possible, a more participatory or immersive approach that produces unexpected results.

Wochenklausur's *Boat Talks* in Zurich provide a very straight-forward example. When I talked to Wolfgang or some of the other group members about this project I don't think they necessarily expected that they could get all of these people to sit down and agree to fund a boarding house for sex workers in conservative Zurich, but that's exactly what happened. That was an event, so to speak, but that event extended over a period of eight weeks. That is what interests me about coming up with a language to talk about the transformation of human cognition, self-consciousness, the movement outside of self and fixity which takes place through extended exchange and interaction.

[Bell]

Grant Kester: … yes! And I don't know what the answer is yet, but that is something I'm interested in, yes.

Carole Gray: OK, that beautiful sound tells me that we've got to finish and thank you very, very much for your participation. You were absolutely excellent, very enthusiastic and very well-informed. I would like to thank Grant especially for the superb lecture and the question and answer session, and also Suzanne.

The Context of Oakland - political, social and cultural

Suzanne Lacy: This morning I'm going to show you a 12 minute video that has just shorts of three Oakland projects.

They began in 1991 and ended in 2001 and there were many more projects than three. These are three of the largest. The one (I think significant one but missing this morning) is one with pregnant teenagers *Expectations* 1997.

This work began with an enquiry. Chris Johnson and I began to work in a high-school class and over time we evolved an analysis with teachers, educators and the youth themselves. As we grew into the work, we began to understand what we had intuited - that youth occupied a very contested place at that moment in the emerging culture of 1990, '91, '92, particularly in California where the numbers of youth were increasing. What was called, at that point, the ethnic minority has now become the ethnic majority in California.

There was a population shift taking place and now, as always in California, a tug of war between very conservative forces and very liberal forces in the same state. Youth operated politically as an image around which policy was made by various forms of manipulation of that image. African-American men, in particular young men, became an image of fear on television and in the media. This image resulted in quite a few policies and laws drafted during the '90s. These developments coincided with a continued erosion of both public school systems at entry level and at the higher education level.

At the same time, California saw a boom in prison growth in rural areas. There was also a growing resistance around criminal justice issues. Between the eighties and the nineties was also a shift in public money from other kinds of social welfare into the criminal justice system. Nationally, police departments were asked to respond to issues like community policing. On a local level some departments initiated youth centres. Police were, in some locales, expected to pick up truants and take them back to school, to take kids out of violent or abusive homes and so on. Some police felt that they were being funded to become social workers.

At the same time as the rise in public spending on criminal justice and public fear of crime, there was also a development we have called youth culture. This included music, clothing styles, forms of speech, and in some cases political activity. It was quite obvious in urban centres like Oakland where teenagers who were highly talented and very verbal, were involved in developing the beginnings of rap and other, newer music. Of course, corporations were climbing on the opportunity to exploit popular culture - in the early nineties you saw McDonalds beginning to use rap in their commercials.

This was the kind of environment that we operated in at the beginning, an environment of both fear of youth and youth activism.

The Artists' Analysis – A texture of relationships

Our analysis grew through reading, of course, but it also grew through talking with the young people. We listened very carefully to them and to their teachers about their experiences. We listened to teachers telling us they didn't know what to do when a kid came to their house and they knew he had just been thrown out of his home. What was a teacher *supposed* to do in that situation?

We were also fortunate to have a very activist community in Oakland, one filled with diversity and cross-cultural communication. In the public school systems the population was half African-American, almost a quarter Latino and a quarter Asian American, with a few others who were mostly white. Private schools were growing and there the statistics were reversed: 95 % white. Schools in Oakland are a battlefield; not just for the kids but for politicians, school board members, angry parents and activists. Funding, or lack of funding, for the public schools was always a topic of conversation. In tough urban areas, the school environment involved locked toilets, kids running around the halls, teachers with bullhorns, and so on.

We were challenged by working with young people. Were we exploiting youth? Were we taking a proactive stance with respect to youth development? It is difficult to work with any particular group, but especially young people, without looking hard at the many ways they need support. Every project became much more extensive and much more cumbersome because of the need to develop support systems within the work, including youth education, training, and development systems.

Fortunately, at that time and in parallel with our work there were many adults taking an interest in young people. Community members, teachers, politicians were asking - What is going wrong with the culture that cannot support its youth, that cannot educate them and that is afraid of them? A lot of people, often white people, were afraid of being killed in this tough urban environment. The irony was that it was not the white people who were being killed. It was young African-American men. Those men had families, mothers, sisters, fathers who took an active interest in changing things for youth. Nevertheless, white people (upper and middle class people) were extremely frightened of those images of young African-American teenagers in hoodies hanging out on street corners in downtown Oakland. They looked like the young men they saw on television at night being arrested for shooting someone.

Oakland was a symbol for a racially diverse, somewhat ominous, high crime city. Our projects took place within these contradictory systems.

We looked at the institutions that served youth. In each project we worked with our own youth advisory group. This group was created for the particular project. We had not set out to do a series of ten years' worth of performances. In the beginning we thought we were doing just one project, but out of each project grew others. Throughout the process of developing the project, these youth groups advised us on the current and subsequent performances. In addition to the performances, which you will see, there were workshops (as Grant alluded to last night).

There were a complicated series of personal relationships. If a kid in his first job got caught with lifting money out of the till, we would go to court with him. If a young woman who was pregnant had a bladder infection, we would take her to the hospital.

Other than the scary young male teenager, another potent symbol in public culture was the image of the female pregnant African-American teenager. Although in California, I believe teen pregnancy rates are higher in the Latino population, it was the Black teenager that carried the weight of the stigma of 'welfare mom'. The young women would tell us that when they rode on the bus, for instance, strangers thought they could touch and talk about their bellies, often negatively: 'Oh, there is one of them' This was at the same time that welfare was being dismantled, both in California and later, nationally.

So, young pregnant African-American teenage girls became a symbol for the cause of pretty much everything else going on in California including prison growth, incarceration rates, mental health problems and so on. This is not just hypothesis on my part. This is demonstrated in politicians' speeches. The correlation between those issues became causative.

The 'We' was a complicated coming together

Let me just say one thing about the 'we' that I keep referring to in this group. 'We' was a complicated coming-together – diverging and coming together again – of probably a 100 to 150 people that were core people. They consisted of artists, politicians, teachers, police people, health professionals and college students and youth. Some youth actually grew up to become part of the core planning team of artists. It was a complicated net. One person would work with you on one project, then leave and come back again later. When I say 'we', I mean collectively a kind of a difficult-to-identify, but very known-to-each other group of people. We still run into each other. Although I don't live there any more it is not uncommon to run into, say, Shawn or Rishone or Ogubala, and its like "Ohmigosh, Ogubala, did you just graduate from college, already?" or "Look, there's Alberta who was such a rascally teenager screaming at cops, and is now a youth worker!" Of course, many of the artists also stay in contact. A lot of us have friendship networks that have continued over time.

It is a very complicated 'we', but it is always a 'we.' never an 'I'.

Representation or Appropriation?

I think Adele raised a very important issue last night, and we will return to it again and again –that is appropriation and experience, and who has a right to speak for whom. The teenagers in Oakland are quite independent. Often from 10 to 13 years old they are travelling around the city on buses by themselves. In a politicised environment with mature teenagers there is no way that a middle-aged, white woman could convince 220 mostly African-American and Latino teenagers to come anywhere in Oakland. I did not try to do that. The work was always done by youth, sometimes working with adults. In this case 40 teenagers were involved with ten teachers from eight different high schools.

The 150 teenagers that came to be in *Code 33* were recruited by Unique Holland, one of the young women who was 15 when she first began to work on the projects. She recruited these teenagers with her team of youth who were all paid to be organizers. She is now in college. I would have absolute no credibility in that environment.

When we created a workshop for youth and police, we worked with the kids who had been referred by truancy officers. We contracted Unique and Greg Hodge to lead the group. Hodge was a youth worker, lawyer and school board member during this time. Again, can you imagine how I would have any credibility leading a group of largely African-American and Latino teenagers and police officers?

That gives you some background for looking at this video. It does not reveal the complexity of this work. It is very important for you to hear the voices of people engaged with the work. I found years ago that when I represented it through slides, audiences were confused. They really only thought about what they were seeing from one context - the one they were in. This was a largely white audience of artists and students, with a white presenter talking about the people of colour. Those lectures set up a representational framework that people found hard to understand, particularly since the art school experience is fairly segregated. Art school students do not really experience deep community-level collaboration. That is part of what Grant means about the complexity of this work being hard to access.

Code 33

[Video clip: *Code 33*]

Suzanne Lacy: The performance of *Code 33* took place on two floors. At the top of the garage there was the youth/police dialogue involving between 150 youth and 100 officers. On the next floor there were small group discussions of 30-35 groups. After this was over on the next floor down there were 80 people from eight different communities having a conversation with each other about what they had just witnessed and how it linked to their own community. Those are the comments that you heard as a voice over towards the end of the tape.

Speaker: How long did those youth-police conversations go on for?

Suzanne Lacy: One hour.

Speaker: But also, how many weeks, or months, or whatever.

Suzanne Lacy: There were two separate processes in *Code 33*. Both took place over different time periods. One was a workshop that was meant to be a prototype of a police training activity. It was a televised programme, three hours a week for five weeks, and it was very closely moderated. The second was the performance itself. For that there were two preparatory conversations: in private before the performance with the participating groups and one final conversation that was the public performance.

In each project, workshop and performance, there was a ratio of 2:3; police to young people. That was our strategy. We involved more youth because adult voices are more dominant. Their greater numbers in a group gave them a kind of equality in the situation.

At the performance itself, at least inside the building, there were about a thousand people that had already got in before the *Free Mumia* protests started. At this point the police closed the building. There were probably another thousand people (or so I was told) on the street who could not get in. Grant witnessed half of what happened. He was one of those who couldn't get into the performance. I witnessed the other half from up above on the top of the building.

The performative conversations, held in public, had less resolution than the private conversations. They were shorter in duration. They didn't have the length of time it would take for participants to develop more intimacy with each other. Those performative conversations had a different intent. They were not a prototype training program. They had to do with a repositioning of the relationship between youth and police, to demonstrate that

the police department took this issue seriously, that cops could learn to talk differently to kids. These were meant to be an incursion into public sensibility, a media reframing, more than an experience of personal transformation for the performers, although of course some relationships did get a bit easier. Some cops did get a bit more relaxed around youth afterward.

Speaker: What happened after the videos and the performances happened? Did the young people take it on themselves to organise themselves in doing any further work?

Suzanne Lacy: I think there is a misconception, or perhaps it is the failure to communicate the scope of this work. There was not a single "group" of young people. There are multiple youth, youth groups, organizations, mentors, adult activists, politicians, artists, who interacted in different ways over ten years. Some young people went into other organizations, and some went to jail. Some did not get pregnant again, and some did. Some went to college and some became activists or youth development workers. I guess what I'm responding to is the notion in your question that there was "the young people" of this project. This is not ten kids who went through a performance and then went on to do something else. It is a much broader kind of activity.

I can give you several pieces of anecdotal information about several different students. I know personally of three students, of over 1,000 we worked with, who became youth workers. One became an abortion counsellor, one a beauty parlour owner, one a veterinarian, and so on. As for specific projects each project led to others, advised and recommended by some of the youth themselves. After *Code 33*, a group of students who attended Fremont High came back to us and said, 'We want to do the same thing with our teachers'. We then worked with them for a period of about three months to do just that.

Monica Vykoukal: And the police did the whole training as part of their normal work life? It was not something they had to do in addition?

Suzanne Lacy: The police participated on paid time. That was an interesting point of negotiation with the City. What would they pay the police to do - to participate in a workshop with youth? Did they see that as an important part of their community policing and police training? That was the argument we made.

Roxanna Meechan: And the youth, were they paid at all?

Suzanne Lacy: Yes, the youth leaders, co-ordinators, youth planning team, were paid but not the performers in the large events. There was not enough money for that.

Andrew MacLean: You said it happened in about 1999. It seems to have had quite an effect on the participants. Has anything taken its place to see that it continues?

Suzanne Lacy: Again, this project is not singular. In Oakland there are dozens of development organisations, school-based projects, political organizations, and so on for young people. A huge youth-run media centre has developed – not out of this project, but at the end of our series of projects. Our work was some of the most visible. It had a very specific function in the public sphere. Other work was, for instance, deeper, or broader in scope, or more educational, or longer or shorter lived, and so on and so on.

This project was meant for us as artists to work alongside activists and politicians. Sheila Jordan, the City Council person that started the youth policy is now the Superintendent of Schools for Alameda County. She is still a good friend. She still develops youth

development programs. The youth policy is still in place. The *Kids First* grants are still in place. At California College of the Arts, the college I was working at, we started a centre for teaching college students and developing community programs. One of my former college students has a well established youth arts program that she started from the ground up. It is a creative town. There is a lot going on.

Grant and I want to talk about these issues of aesthetic and ethics.

Do you want to say something as an introduction?

Aesthetics: An historical framing

Grant Kester: Well, I'll begin with a short framing discussion about aesthetics and ethics. Anne, Suzanne and I had a conversation yesterday about aesthetics and the fact that the term aesthetics often seems alien to practitioners. There is an historical reason for that, I think.

I want to focus on aesthetics because of the tendency to collapse the aesthetic into questions of form and visuality. Usually, when somebody refers to 'aesthetics' in discussing a work of art they ask 'what does it look like?' or 'what shape is it?' or 'how does it appear visually?'. That has relatively little to do with the early modern history of aesthetics, which began about 200 years ago. It is a term that was originally used to define a mode of social interaction set apart from other forms of political discourse.

Aesthetic interaction in the early philosophical tradition is concerned with experiences that have the potential to unite people in some way, outside of conventional forms of absolutist secular or religious power. This is where we encounter the concept of *Gemeinsinn* or common sense, *sensus communis* in Latin. The aesthetic really begins as a way to talk about a social exchange, a way of being together, that is rooted in the individual, rather than collapsed into external forms of religious or earthly authority. It just happens that this quasi-anthropological idea of something that brings us together in the aesthetic is worked through in ways that have to do with bodily experience. Aesthetics is from *aisthesis* in the Greek, which means 'bodily experience'. It doesn't really have much to do with art *per se* initially. It is only in the 19th century that 'art' gets attached to that concept.

Reclaiming a broader understanding of aesthetics

What I try to do in my work is to reclaim something of that broader understanding. Certain orders of experience enable us to perceive the world outside of a self interested, acquisitive, possessive model of knowing. They allow us to access the underlying operations of human cognition. When we cease looking at the world as a thing to be possessed and to be turned to our needs, we reflectively become aware of the fact that *that* way of knowing the world is something that we must all share.

This brings us a sense of the possibility of a kind of community that is not externally imposed, but is felt at the individual level. It makes reference to the possibility of a larger sense of being together.

I would contend that the aesthetic is an essentially ethical discourse. It does not make much sense to me to divide the aesthetic and the ethical. They have always been co-extensive. We can see vestiges of this history in the notion that art constitutes a universal language. Kandinsky and the Blue Rider, Pollock, any number of avant garde groups imagined that their work operated at some trans-historical level of human experience that

was universally accessible to people. This comes from an early modern notion of aesthetic knowledge as a new form of being together. That association with collectivity gradually goes underground in the modern period.

Suzanne Lacy: How does it get linked so strongly, now, in the arts with visual, aural, kinaesthetic experience. For example, how is theatre explained?

Grant Kester: Yes, I'll try and condense that a little bit. What happens is that these philosophical ideas are eventually taken up in the work of Hegel. It is really Hegel who first begins to take the idea of an aesthetic experience that would have previously been associated with the experience of the natural world and apply it specifically to objects of human production, and works of art in particular. This in turn spawns the modern tradition of art theory in the mid - to late 19th century. In that context it becomes the form of the work that is the carrier of its universality, rather than the cognitive operations of the mind and its relationship to difference.

There are a variety of reasons for that. One of them is the fact that European art history and theory is being written in the context of a flood of cultural artefacts arriving from other colonized countries or from archaeological excavations. 19th century Europeans are really puzzling over what to do with all of these artefacts from Africa, India and elsewhere. They knew little or nothing of the history or the cultural or religious traditions that gave these objects their initial meaning so instead they concentrated on visual appearance. This decision to focus on the *form*, not the *context* of the work, is one of the founding gestures of modern art history.

In fact, in this tradition the *less* we know of an object's ritual and utilitarian context and the *more* we can detach it from its rootedness in the specific and the quotidian, the more easily we can use it as a kind of leverage point to achieve aesthetic transcendence. This strategic relocation of the nodal point of universality to the object's appearance leads to the 20th century traditions of formalism.

Suzanne Lacy: That notion of art theory that, say, Miwon Kwon might put forward, it seems to me, continues to privilege certain notions of aesthetics that are not concerned with retrieving this original meaning of aesthetics.Why haven't other people tried to retrieve this broader notion of aesthetics?

Grant Kester: Oh! I don't know. [laughter]

Suzanne Lacy: Well, speculate!

Art as text

Grant Kester: Well, ok, I'm going to have to find an answer to that. Maybe I can answer it indirectly. I think that what happened is that the discourse of formalism, which fell out of favour in the 1970s, was resuscitated by the rise of post-structuralist theory in the art world. In particular, there was the tendency of post-structuralist literary theory to define the work of art as a kind of text that is subject to a decoding operation, a certain hermeneutic interaction. The people that begin to be read in the world of art and art theory in 1980s, Roland Barthes, Derrida and so on, almost all came from a background in poetics and literary theory.

That naturalises the idea that the work of art is a formal device that operates through certain notions of play and textual indeterminacy. It also perpetuates the idea that the work carries its meaning with it, at the level of it's form. There is a longer discussion to be had about why this occurs, but I think the effect of it is to *retool* formalism into what I term a "textual" paradigm of art practice.

Greenberg's locus of resistance within formalism was the opacity of the form of the work, which functioned as a critique of the transparency of representational art. That shifts into the work of art as a critique of signification instead of representation. We already see that beginning in the 1980s with certain post-modern art practices that claim to interrupt or destabilize the signifying process in some way. This approach works fine if you're dealing with literary poetics and indeterminacy in a text, but I think it had the effect of making it very difficult to attend to certain kinds of practices that do not involve a fixed object or a sculpture or installation that is created ahead of time and then placed before the viewer for decoding or interpretation. Textual hermeneutics works with object-based production, but with process-based work the concept of 'text' itself has to be re-thought.

Suzanne Lacy: There is a text, but it is not revealed text. Text could be what takes place in the community, in an ongoing way through conversation, and engagement, but it's not available.

Grant Kester: Yes, and at that point you have lost the significance of text in the post-structuralist tradition –as a thing subjected to deconstruction and as such it has to be …

Suzanne Lacy: … available

Grant Kester: … exist in a way that it can be read; not that it has unitary meaning, but that it has a certain fixity in space.

Suzanne Lacy: The interesting thing is, it has to have a fixity with respect to who is doing the looking. There is still no single perspective doing the looking here in the Oakland projects. The looking is decentred so that the text is read through multiple people, not through a single person. I think that's one of the problems of this kind of work when we look deeply at what are the results. Where does it all come together so that we can look at it in a critical way?

Art/Life as Experience

Let me say something about the evolution of aesthetics in my practice. I did not come from an art theoretical perspective. I was trained first in science. I learned about art first through an emerging activism within feminism. Then at Cal Arts, I was subject to an avant garde discourse with people like Alan Kaprow, Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins, encountering the Fluxus and Happenings traditions. All of my art history education was basically European and US-based avant garde and performance throughout the 20th century. I was already versed in feminism and in race activism and community organising when I came into art.

The interesting encounter for me was with Kaprow and the kind of art-life dialectic that he was framing. At that point in time his ideas were influencing a group of younger performance artists in Los Angeles including Paul McCarthy, Chris Burden, Barbara Smith, Nancy Buchanan and a range of people who considered themselves, for the first time, performance artists only. In other words, we weren't gallery artists in any way, shape or form. We were experimenting with performance.

Kaprow was exploring art/life from an individual relational experience. For example, he was exploring what was going to happen in your mind, my mind, and in Grant's mind, if I sit here for 30 minutes with my hand casually placed on his shoulder. That's the theatre Kaprow was interested in, the theatre of experience.

It wasn't hard to take this on as an activist and a feminist. I was concerned, as well, with who had access to art and who made art. In a way it was part of a hidden discourse on class, as well as a more overt discourse on gender. Who got to be the artist? Who was taken seriously as an artist? Was it only those white guys in the museums, or did somebody else get to make art? Lucy Lippard explored this in her book *Pink Glass Swan* (1995). So we were exploring both the identity of the artist and his or her role, along with the reception points of the art.

You can trace some of this as well in the thinking of Alan Kaprow. Kaprow was an American, a pragmatist inspired by John Dewey and also a Buddhist. This complex person was the American version of Joseph Beuys. His thinking, like yours Grant, was very open; very inquiring; not so much 'It is not…'. He was less interested in critical distinctions and more interested in what there was to be found out. He was interested in working on the edge of where it could be art and it could be life, and of asking what made it either. I have always seen myself as working with that same edge.

There were a lot of folks in Southern California, like Helen and Newton Harrison, Eleanor and David Antin, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula and so on in San Diego, who participated in a shared discourse. At that point in time experimental, relational ideas about art weren't particularly contested as they seem to be today. I think it was because, in one sense, most of us were pretty far outside the confines of power. Nobody needed to contest it. It was a sort of an idiosyncratic set of ideas. It was also a very experimental time.

Feminism

So, as feminists we were concerned with relationships, first and foremost. We launched many collaborative practices. As feminists, concerned with political issues that happened to women regardless of their culture, it was natural for us to reach out to different communities. We began to site works in public in ways that seemed intuitive in the beginning. We made aesthetic decisions that were also intuitive. Even within my own practice, I would say, 'Ah! Making it safe! Sorry, that became community practice. *Three weeks in May* (1997), interesting; that one made it into art.' But I don't think we ever managed to articulate what those aesthetics consisted of; maybe the painters did, but not performance artists. We did talk a lot about ethics and politics though.

Somehow there was a set of intuitive ideas about aesthetics. I don't think they have been articulated yet, and certainly not with respect to the history of theory as it impacts public art, until you (Grant) have been trying to parse this territory.

Grant Kester: Yes, it is striking, if you talk to practitioners, how often the "art" question comes up. For most of the practitioners I talk to there seems to be an internal compass that is not always overtly articulated, but which leads them to *feel* that this is an art practice. It is a belief that is very strongly held, but it is not …

Suzanne Lacy: … articulated.

Grant Kester: Yes, and it is not something that practitioners feel obliged to provide programme notes for. But at the very core of their practice is an intuition, a valuable intuition, I think, that their work remains artistic in some ways.

Suzanne Lacy: I think it is also, in a sense, connected to one's educational context and pedigree. In other words, had I continued in community organising, psychology and social psychology, I might have done similar things but would not have addressed the kinds of concerns I did when I went to Cal Arts and discovered that (art) methodology.

Art practice and adjacent disciplines

Grant Kester: I also like to go to the disciplines that are proximate to art practice and look at the practitioners in those disciplines whose work verges on the same territory.

I did a talk before I came here at the Woodbury Institute, which is an architectural school in San Diego where a colleague of mine named Teddy Cruz used to teach. I was talking to the architects and designers about their relationship to artists, coming at their work from overlapping points of participatory production and so on.

To give you an example of this - Teddy Cruz is an architect who has spent a lot of time studying vernacular traditions of housing and design in Tijuana in the border region. There is relatively little zoning enforcement in Tijuana, which is just across the border from San Diego. There are all kinds of really remarkable developments: houses with space for the grandparents upstairs, and a store on the front level and patio at the back. These are very improvisational approaches to living and working space.

Tijuana is a huge, growing city and, at any rate, these building practices are really interesting. Then you cross the border into San Diego, and everything is based on conventional, gridded, land use planning – you can only have residences here and businesses there – that sort of thing. Teddy took a lot of the lessons from Tijuana construction and then set up these pilot projects in working class neighbourhoods in San Diego. The projects often violate zoning ordinances, but accommodate themselves to the way people actually live and work. They are so effective that the city has been forced to acknowledge and accept them.

To me it is a really good example of one of these boundary practices. When I talked to Teddy about this, I told him 'You're in this really interesting zone where it starts to feel like an art practice'. The architects look at Teddy and tell him, "It's not architecture." Where is the generative author? You're just borrowing ideas. I think there's something to be said for the messiness of those in-between zones.

The Aesthetics of the Oakland projects as a visual and cultural discourse

Suzanne Lacy: So, let's talk about aesthetics in the Oakland Projects and then go on to ethics because there may be a difference in where you locate the aesthetics and where I do.

Grant Kester: Yes, I think that is probably true, maybe not a difference, but just a difference of emphasis. I was trying to sketch this out when the video was up there. One of the effects of the transformation of the aesthetic into a discourse on the visual, specifically, or the retinal is that it unfolds into a set of debates about manipulation and the image as

manipulative. This is where the whole discourse on kitsch comes from: the fear of propaganda and advertising. The fear of images goes back to Plato and the cavern of the senses. So there's a long tradition that assumes that images are going to lead us astray in some way.

A lot of the discourse that comes out of the transformation of the aesthetic into a discourse of the visual is based on this anxiety. It is partly the fear that art will be contaminated or co-opted by other cultural forms. It is a fear of the image being instrumentalized in some way and needing to defend itself from that manipulation. The other side of that dynamic is the belief that it is precisely by remaining in the domain of the image or semblance that the work of art can stave off its assimilation by these other forces.

What that means in art, and I think I alluded to this yesterday, is a narrowing of the bandwidth of aesthetic experience that cuts out whole registers of somatic, bodily, physical knowledge. Suzanne, you described this as the kinaesthetic or it could be described as the haptic. This knowledge embraces all kinds of other orders of bodily experience, or discursive experience for that matter, that simply cannot be understood as purely visual and yet were absolutely essential to the experience of 'works of art' in the past.

Let me look at *'Code 33'* just to give you a sense of my thought process. I've heard Unique Holland talk about the process of *'Code 33'* and the meetings that led up to it. I often found myself as interested in those conversations, which laid the groundwork for the project, as I was in the conversations that constitute the image of the project. Those laborious, difficult, messy, maybe even un-visual exchanges, to me, are central to the aesthetics of the piece. That doesn't mean that the staged conversations are not also essential, but they are of a different order aesthetically for me.

I mentioned this tendency with the work of Superflex. There are things I really like about Superflex's collaborative work, but the fine-grained nature of those interactions are seldom enunciated as a part of the creative practice. That is one of the things I've been trying to work through in my current research. I believe there is a way to understand these interactions aesthetically, in the full meaning of aesthetics as a complex ethical, political and cultural discourse.

So, I was making a little tip-of-the-iceberg diagram. The tip of the iceberg is the day of the performance, and then there is this huge mass of extremely complex human relational interaction that goes on leading up to that.

Suzanne Lacy: In any given conversation there is often a visual component, particularly in this environment (Oakland). I remember Moira Roth witnessing one of our early planning sessions where we got a group of youth and police together. She remarked on the visual - a large cop stuffed in his uniform and the body language of the teenagers. It was fascinating to watch those kinds of plays over time.

It is important for me to talk about the formal, the visual as part of the whole process. The process takes place over a large geographic area around the topic. I will not address topics here. I will focus on the way the piece is constructed visually. It comes together at a point in time within a theatrical expression. The tableau of the theatrical expression is multi-vocal. That is very important. Once the audience is in the space, they are allowed to move rather freely and to have conversations on the side. There are ethical as well as formal aesthetic concerns about how people receive the information; how the audience is structured and moves through the space. There is a lot of attention to the visual. It may not be apparent

but there is actually a designer who designed the stage set with the red, white and black swathe of cars. There are other artists involved in various ways.

Then there is 'after'. Part of the aesthetics for me is located in whatever is presented as the performative part of the work. Another part lies in questions of representation after the event such as on the news media. When the newscaster says, 'It's hard to keep out of trouble, nowadays'. Kids, always pick up on that. They react 'Oh, look what they did to us' again.

There is also the more complicated issue of the representation of the work 'post-performance' into or with respect to the art world.

The area that you talked about, which I have always thought about in terms of coherence, authenticity of process, empathy, relationship – that territory which I don't have very good words for also has an aesthetic component. That seems to be what you are exploring in your theoretical writing.

Creating a different *habitus* for encountering authority

Grant Kester: It is, but I think your point is well taken about the *habitus* of the space in these exchanges. The performativity of the piece in terms of just the police is very complex – I don't know how it compares to Scotland, and maybe it is somewhat similar. In the US for poor and working class people, the police are often the primary point of contact that people have with any sort of public or state agency. These performative interactions, in which individuals come into contact with authority, have been decisive in Southern California. I think of this piece in connection to the '65 riots in Watts in South Central Los Angeles, which were started by a very simple police interaction with a black man. There was a guy named Marquette Frye who was in Watts, on Avalon Boulevard. He was pulled over by LAPD. They thought he was drunk. One thing led to the next, and it escalated into a violent arrest, before you know it you had the Watts riots.

The LAPD, at the time, was known as one of the most up-to-date police forces in the United States. As opposed to the New York City Police Department, which was massive, the LAPD was very small in proportion to the scale of LA. The way they made up for their small size was through very aggressive law enforcement, an exemplary mode of enforcement of the law that sends a message that you don't mess with the LAPD.

So, policing as a performance is really crucial to the racial and class history of the United States in the last 30 or 40 years. Intervening in that performance and creating a different *habitus,* or a different space or a tableau if you will, around those moments of interaction is really important. It points in two directions. In one direction it points out and presents a kind of alternative image for media consumption, essentially. Then, the other direction is –and this is where my emphasis would be – the effect of those interactions on the participants themselves, how consciousness is changed, remodelled, by sitting down together face to face.

What changed? Approaches to analysis

This is partly a research question about this kind of practice for myself. Suzanne, herself, has gone back and started to interview a number of the participants in these projects after the fact to find out what the effect of their involvement was, their participation, and to reflect back on it. That is going to be a really interesting document to take a look at, to see what was changed. How do people view their experience in this as a way to get at some of these

questions of empathetic transformation, identification across boundaries of difference and so on?

Suzanne Lacy: This discussion leads us on to ethics. I have always been rather sceptical as soon as one starts talking about results, or what changed. I think that there is a way in which early on we assumed too many things were indeed true. They were generally based on anecdotal evidence. We were always hearing artists talk about how that person cried, and they therefore knew that this impact was had. I further have always been rather sceptical about whether a change in perception actually happens. This is what I am most interested in. In the case of the political environment, I am interested in the way in which that experience may or may not have impacted either on the city structure or, in particular, the institution of policing.

We have too quickly conflated those kinds of results with the ethics of the work and the success of the work. The areas that I've been looking at are maybe sites of enquiry in this work. What are the places we can look at to have a conversation about ethics?

The first seems to me to lie within the analysis of the process. Analysis is highly suspect. Are you making a leftist analysis or a neo-liberal analysis or so on?

In your work you discuss complexity. You would, I think, say that, for example, the Oakland projects are perhaps a little more sophisticated analytically than Dawn Dedeaux's work (e.g. *Soul Shadows* 1993), where there is a whole genre of work which is meant to serve or do good. Dedeaux' work is a good case study, but there are many that can be exactly like that. She works in a prison without any sort of deconstruction of prison or the way in which prisons or criminal justice operates within the United States or with regard to race and gender.

So there is the area of analysis that is an aspect of ethical enquiry. How ethical, how connected, how comprehensive, how relevant, is that? One could adopt, for example, a notion of service and say that, if she (Dedeaux) serves in a Buddhist sensibility, analysis as a compassionate response to pain is enough.

You can site an ethical enquiry in the process and, within that, issues of collaboration come up such as the de-centring of authority.

There is also a sub-category – relationship. How do you relate to individuals – adult, teacher-type person; teenager, student-type person? Where and how are the authorities centred? There is class and race. Race is probably, in my mind, the biggest kind of ethical relational issue within this work and, certainly the one that I am most interested in and have been traditionally from the beginning of my work.

Another site of the enquiry would be the personal actions outside of the equation – but you could call it the intentions, you could call it commitment and you might measure it by relationships after the work.

Then finally, the three Rs. A site of the enquiry would be the public actions outside of this equation, which are representations, responses and results. By representations I mean, how does the work appear on television, how does it appear in an art museum and, if it does, how does it appear back in the community? How is it re-represented over time? Then results: Did police training change? Responses: Did something happen directly as a response?

The *Free Mumia* protestors in *Code 33*

The *Free Mumia* protesters came out as a response to the piece – *Code 33*. Mumia Abu Jamal was convicted in Philadelphia of killing a police officer. His case has been hugely significant. You could probably explain this much more articulately than I.

Grant Kester: It's a death-row case. It has got a lot of attention because the evidence that he was convicted on is somewhat sketchy.

Suzanne Lacy: Yes. He has become cause celêbre in the United States. Within the week of the performance of *Code 33*, he had had one of his last appeals overturned. There was going to be a protest. The protesters planned that the protest would coincide with the performance. They knew there would be a lot of media there. They also knew the position of some aspects of critical resistance to the prison movement. In the United States within the Criminal Justice Movement you should have nothing to do with police. The police are the more or less blind instruments of capitalist authority. They represent the protection of property. (By the way this is an issue that even the kids and the police explored with each other within *Code 33*. They discussed the notion of what property the police were protecting, why and what it meant to do so).

The *Free Mumia* protest arrived at the performance of *Code 33* – about a 100 people strong. It wasn't a huge group of people, but it was very vocal. It was comprised largely of college students, but instigated by one of the police watch groups in San Francisco, Van Johnson's work. Behind the scenes we began a negotiation because most of us were *Free Mumia* activists. Most of us had the same position with one significant difference. We didn't believe that you *should not* interact with police around the situation; that you ignored them and that you adopted a protest mentality. So it was simply a difference in strategy. We did understand that.

We launched into a behind-the-scenes negotiation between our project, the police and the *Free Mumia*. That is why the piece *Code 33* started a little late. There were discussions and decisions that were made. We offered a platform, multiple platforms. The police recommended that we didn't have Act One. This was going to be police going in one direction around the building and low riders in another. We made a decision not to go ahead because the fear was that low riders, who are *really* particular about their cars, might be in some way encroached upon by enthusiastic demonstrators. If somebody leant up against a low rider car, the guy is going to get out and beat you up. The police were worried that the group of Latino low riders and the group of mostly white college student protesters would create yet another kind of dynamic. The police did what police do and for those of you on the street, I think the event appeared probably very successful from a *Free Mumia* point of view. They got a lot of PR *and* they managed to show the police in their least benign representation.

The police cordoned off the building such that, not only you, Grant, having come from Arizona but, the Fire Chief, who was a good friend of mine, could not get up to the performance. The police thought they were protecting the performance, believe it or not. They were also incredibly nervous, as police officers will be, about a display of vulnerability in a public space. Some of the behind-the-scenes conversations were whether or not the police should be in uniform at the performance. That had huge implications for their civic role besides the theatrical implications. For the police to be wearing a gun or a uniform in the middle of a public event means he will, or she will, be called upon if anything happens.

The individual police officer has that consciousness. If you are not in uniform, what is your responsibility to protect the civic environment?

There were lots of behind-the-scenes negotiations that came to what happened that night.

Analysis as the coming together of different perceptions

Four areas that I want Grant to comment on, and maybe change, include the ethical sites of enquiry, the analysis, the process and relationships, the commitments or intentions of the group, and the representations and results.

Grant Kester: Yes, I hadn't thought to kind of break them out like that, myself. So that is interesting.

Suzanne Lacy: How would you? What are some of the points of the ethical conversation?

Grant Kester: Yes, we could look at the question of analysis to begin with.

When you say 'analysis', we might think of a given project as carrying a particular understanding of a context in a complex way. That understanding is the aggregation of the artist's knowledge of the political context, but also the understanding of the collaborators. There is probably not a single analysis, rather the analysis is produced through the fractured coming-together of a lot of different perceptions. So, maybe the analysis of some of the young people in the Oakland Projects – their version of police identity, their reading of the police as the embodiment of state power, will be different from some other people in the project.

That's why the Dawn Dedeaux project provides a good counterpoint, when it comes to the complexity of locating a work in situations that are so vexed and so politically over-determined, and the necessity of spending a good bit of time acquiring a deeply-textured knowledge of that life world. Her analysis was, in my view, fairly naïve about the political economy of incarceration, drug laws and enforcement in the United States. I suppose the lack of the complexity in her understanding of the situation is what allowed the project to be so easily appropriated to other ends, to be used by social agencies for ends that might be politically questionable, even to the artist herself if she had been able to work through them a little more deeply. That project ended up being a way to bludgeon young black kids in Baltimore into renouncing their incipient evil ways for fear of ending up like the bad criminals in the videos.

The way that ethics enters into that work is complicated. I don't know that there's an ethical and unethical analysis. Perhaps I would say that there is a political analysis that has ethical implications. I guess I can't easily identify the locus for the ethical differentiation there.

Suzanne Lacy: That's the process.

Grant Kester: Yes – the process.

Aesthetics, Ethics and Power

Suzanne Lacy: But the analysis - Could I do that piece (*Code 33*) if I didn't have much of a race consciousness?

Grant Kester: You could certainly do it – but it might be a piece that would be damaging to the people that you are ostensibly trying to help.

Suzanne Lacy: Help?

Grant Kester: But that would be my interpretation, yes!

Suzanne Lacy: Yes, but not mine and that's where we get into politics, though.

Grant Kester: Exactly, yes.

Suzanne Lacy: Ok. So then what about the notion of aesthetics as it relates to process? Do you want to expand on that a bit?

Grant Kester: Yes, maybe I can step back a bit to discuss where I see the ethical implications. I would argue that the aesthetic has an implicitly ethical dimension. It has precisely to do with how the individual and the social relate to each other; the one and the many; the group and the singular individual. This is the pathos of the early aesthetic, you know. European society is trying to deal with the breakdown of transcendent forms of political signification and power, so how do we organise democratic will formation? Are we going to descend into chaos, because there's no longer a king ruling over us? How are we going to organise ourselves and not revert to some Hobbesian nightmare? That is really where the aesthetic comes from.

For me it is always a question of negotiating the individual and the social and the relationship between individuals across boundaries of difference, between the singularity of one individual and another. It doesn't have to just be class and race – obviously even within a working class community or within a particular ethnic or racial group, there are profound differences and disagreements that have nothing to do with race, class or ethnicity. The question of ethics for me, always comes back to those negotiations: subject and object; individual and group; and how those are understood to act together. Obviously you don't want to claim that a project can magically dissolve all the differences. .

Suzanne Lacy: Kind of "Can't we all get along?" Martin Luther King.

Grant Kester: Yes.   There's that danger of ignoring the important differences between singularities in these exchanges and papering over them in some sort of naïve multi-culturalism. At the same time, I'm uncomfortable with the alternate option, which is typically offered. That is to simply insist that there is absolutely no ground for individual singularities to communicate with each other, to establish even a provisional consensus. Any consensual knowledge has already been contaminated or tainted by a kind of incipient totalitarianism. I find that a very problematic distinction and it is often made in contemporary theory. I really feel strongly that it is necessary to work out an alternative to a kind of naïve Habermasianism on the one hand and the equally, in my view, naïve Deleuzean fetish of singularity on the other.

Ethics as Negotiation

For me, ethics has to do with that negotiation and how it might ramify outwards to the way that that project transforms the life world around it, as well as inwards, to the way that it transforms the consciousness or the perceptions of the participants.

I'm thinking of Stephen Willats as a good example of this. I can remember asking him, 'You have done all these projects in housing estates. You've been returning to these places for 15 years or more. Why do you keep going back? Are these projects meant to change people's lives? Are you hoping to catalyze some sort of political transformation?' But he's not really interested in that kind of translation into a discrete, utilitarian result. He didn't think a project had failed because he didn't organise a rent strike among the tenants in this council housing estate. I thought that was valuable. It does not mean a project *can't* do that, but he was comfortable with the fact that there was precisely *not* something that had to be immediately transformed into the currency of political effect, in that way.

Suzanne Lacy: Ok, so there is one other issue to be thinking about - What are the ethics of the re-representation of the work in public, into art?

I would like to instead just leave us with that to think about – because we can continue thinking about this through this series. Let's open it up to you to engage with you on issues that might have come up or positions you might be taking for yourself within this maze.

Question and Answer

The perspective of community development

Damian Killeen (Core Group): My history is all in social action, social development of one kind or another. I responded to the structure that you have put around the issue of ethics. The discussion you were having is the same kind of discussion that I have heard many times over for many years within the community development, community action field. Reflective people and effective workers in that field will always be asking these kinds of questions about their practice.

One word that you didn't use, which might have been implied in what you were saying but would definitely be overt in that discussion, was the issue of power. This would be pretty soon on the table as being at the centre of what is being explored. I just make that observation.

On the aesthetic side, I was wondering whether, in my own work in the past, I have had aesthetic concerns. I was very interested in that description of what aesthetic meant because, given that description, yes, I absolutely do have aesthetic concerns - on all sorts of occasions where I am bringing people together where there is a purpose. The word I've written down here that you have used is 'transformational'. It could mean transformation of perception or feeling or relationship or it could mean something more concrete, a change in direction of action. Many people in community development, community education fields and so on will be concerned to create an environment in which people coming into a room or a space, experience some kind of difference from the normal which frees them up to engage with each other in different kinds of ways.

I was intrigued, right at the very beginning, by Suzanne's business of rearranging the chairs. I recognised that happening and I had a wicked thought - Was that an artistic act because it was performed by an artist? It certainly looked like the same kind of thing that I would often do…

Suzanne Lacy: It was the same kind of thing that you would often do.

Damian Killeen: [laughs] That's perfect. So, but I'm really just responding to what I've heard. I think that there are many people working who would not begin to describe their

work as art. They wouldn't be looking for any kind of validation from the art world as to what they are doing. They would have a different related set of arguments, justifications (perhaps, is the word) for being concerned with the aesthetic in the way you described it – the bodily experience of people in space. They would certainly share this ethical agenda.

So, I am, at the beginning of this exercise, wondering where's the art? Or What kind of area is the art-life interchange? To me, the difference – one difference, rather, is the aspect of performance. I can think that towards the end of many projects that I am involved in, there will be some form of presentation of the project. Depending on the nature of the project, it may be very formalised in a conventional sense, or it may be something which people have put a lot of creative thinking into. How can we communicate with people differently about this? So there is an element of performance, but it isn't the intent that there will be performance at the end of it.

Representation of the different constituencies

Jan-Bert van den Berg (Core Group)   I suppose I'm interested in this conversation that we're having about ethics and aesthetics in relation to an arts tradition when a lot of the work we're talking about is created with a whole range of constituent groups. Therefore it is slightly contradictory to then have a discussion around ethics and aesthetics only with one representative of those constituencies here.

Representation of the artist- as author, catalyst, negotiator or medium?

Kerstin Mey (Core Group):   I think my observation was in a similar direction. I would like to summarise it as question. What precisely is the role of the artist in these processes? Is it as facilitator, a catalyst, a medium, a negotiator? How is that role being communicated in the dissemination and the representation of the project afterwards? It is in a way disseminated through a named artist – through a kind of signature artist practice, when in practice it has been a collaborative participatory project. What are the issues that arise out of that?

What does it mean for the artist to reflect and evaluate on a project?

Venda Pollock (Core Group):   I'm interested how you, Suzanne, go back now and reflect on your process with the individuals involved. From my point of view, I 'evaluate'- it is a word I don't like, but it is the easiest word. When I go back to art projects after they have happened and talk to the participants, it is in itself is a very loaded process. I am coming from a certain academic tradition or a position.

With one project I came in afterwards, they heard that I was from a university and that cast the participant in a certain mindset. The language you use has to be adapted so that the participants can feel that they can contribute to the dialogue.

In another project I'm looking at now, I am trying a different tack by being involved in the beginning. That has implicated me in the process, but it opens up a lot more avenues for exploration - trying different ways to get people to talk on a level they'll understand, using verbal or visual techniques.

So I'm quite interested in how you feel what your role is in going back to talk to them. Are you going back as an artist reflecting on your practice? Are you seen as an artist continuing a kind of dialogue that was established? Is the research in itself part of that kind

of practice – that ten-year long trajectory? How does that fit in with the way you are thinking now?

Aims and Expectations of participants

Kate Foster (Core Group):   My question is about aiming for results. When do you articulate your aims, if ever during the project? I've read or I've just heard that you simply aimed to deal with media literacy, not to touch the bigger problems. Then I think I heard later that you aimed for the result of improved training of police.

If your artworks, if your projects, do you have aims, what are the expectations of the participants when they join the artworks?

Artists and State funding

Judith Stewart: I'm particularly interested in the way that Suzanne's practice has come from a socialist, feminist, activist-base that has shaped this way of working.

I am interested in the way that this area of work has been so effectively absorbed by the state in this country to the extent that there is an industry that has built up around it. There are a lot of artists who have gone into this way of working because it brings them an income. A lot of artists have found that where they have started off with ambitions for aesthetic and ethical aims, their work has been adopted and changed into something else. In working on certain projects like this, are we actually just working on behalf of the State to make good citizens who do as they are told?

I would also like to throw in a question to Grant about relational aesthetics, which is a big thing in the UK as well. I wondered how your version of aesthetics fits with that?

Knowledge of the creative process and its reception in public space

Monika Vykoukal (Core Group):   You were talking before about assessing the work or what the work is constituted of. These are both process of developing it and all the social things that actually happened even without taking in the spectators. Suzanne then touched upon the issue of us discussing its presentation in an art gallery. In a sense, the media is an interesting gap or difference between the performance and the theatrical side of the work, its huge choreography and how people relate to each other within the piece. I'm particularly interested in that aspect of Suzanne's work right now.

Also how do you actually assess the visible process, as an artwork? I presume you know because you are always assessing the representation of that.

Group dynamics and the role of the artist

Roxana Meechan (Core Group):   I'm very interested in group dynamics and the artist perhaps setting out some structures, boundaries, for a particular group. Obviously, it is nice when, suddenly, the group takes over and somebody else becomes 'the artist'. Is the role of 'artist' something that is interchangeable between individuals?

First contact with authority: the British picture

Ruth Barker (Core group):   I just wanted to pick up on something that Grant said that actually really changed the way that I personally understood the Oakland projects. You said

that the police are the primary point of contact with the State for the community, for the residents.

I'm from a slightly scummy kind of working class big housing estate in the north of England. The police are certainly not the major or primary point of contact. The police don't ever go there! It's actually really hard to get the police to come out. The primary point of contact is the 'dole' – the Social Security. You have to go every two weeks and sign on and you get your dole money. They don't even call your name. They call you a 'Job Seeker'. I think there is a really important shift – in the kind of power relationships that that embodies i.e. that difference that occurs where the police or the social benefits system are the primary point of contact.

Ways of art living in the world

Janice Parker (Core Group) I'm just thinking about how I know Suzanne's project and how it lives in the world. I'm wondering how and why different kinds of authorship or ownership come about. Does the work live in the world in different ways and different contexts? Do the police have a version of it? Does it live in the world in other ways? Does it exist otherwise?

Suzanne Lacy's Response:

Power

Suzanne Lacy: The issue of power is ongoing. It is as an ethical issue, one of the primary ethical issues. It is bound up with analysis. It is also involved in the process. I personally incorporated it into the work.

In the long trajectories of these pieces we focused in our discussion on *Code 33*. This is interesting because it was the first place that the many, many conflicts inherent in the work came into the actual subject of the performance. They were only referred to in the other pieces because youth had a much more prominent voice. It also had something to do with the *Free Mumia* people showing up and how the whole thing operating as an arena of conflict.

I think it is important to constantly challenge that including the power of one's authority as the 'artist'.

Academic Bias

The second thing is just a brief aside on the notion of academic bias. I think there is only bias in this work. There is no way to have an objective reality. Anything I do with respect to recounting is biased and subject to a lot of decisions that I actually have to make. For example - Am I going to put the *Free Mumia* protest into my film, or am I not? Chris (Johnson) who in that piece, by the way, was called the 'Oreo' by the kids – they found him very inaccessible although, probably to you, he was highly accessible. Chris is the African-American self-educated, colleague of mine who started this whole process. I'm very clear about the way he and I represented a different kind of positioning vis-à-vis race and class and so on, which was opposite from the way the kids understood it.

In the case of me interviewing people, I am not going to people who particularly see me as an academic. They are my friends. I am only interviewing the 20 or 30 people that carried through, over time, in various ways the division of the project.

Similar things are done in a lot of my projects – including a psychologist who looked at the language structure of kids in the groups and developed a masters thesis on it and so on.

Aims and expectations of the work and its participants

The aims, like the analysis, are developed in the process. That is, I have an intuition, then I get together with Chris, and he says, 'You know, I have the same intuition – Let's go find out what those kids are like'. Then we get a kid involved, and the kid says, 'hey, you better…' – Unique Holland was very good in this way.

In *Roof is on Fire* we met every week with a team of 40 kids. They felt that they were the leaders. Out of that 40, there were ten who met and decided the questions. At the rehearsal, the adults took over. I turned into a militant general in the middle of a performance – 'Be there, do that ..'. The kids came up to us afterwards and said, 'Wait a minute. This is not cool. You need to include us all the way.' We explained to them that it was difficult to do so when you are representing the vision, the voice and the experience in the work and when you don't have art experience. There was a complex negotiation that went on around that point between the rehearsal and the performance. I'm not saying that either side had a complete autonomy, but it was a negotiation. It explains to you how the aims of the work and the expectations of the people entering the work are a much more open field than one might see from looking at the end result.

So, it's more like this. I say to Chris 'I don't know those kids. Do you?' He responds, 'I'm black. I'm from the poor neighbourhood, but I don't know them either, but I do know Amelia.' I ask 'What should we do?' He responds 'Well, let's go and teach in the local high school.' Six months later the kids have told us what they think. The teachers have told us as well. We all sit down and say, 'Well, maybe we should do something about this.' And then a local journalist shows up and says, 'I'm going to do a video of this. I'm so excited.' And you say, 'Hah! That's interesting. Let's expand it to eight other schools.' So we go to the school district and say –'Why don't you pay for eight teachers from eight different high schools to come once a month and talk to us not just about media literacy but about all kinds of aspects of the kinds of things that are eventually constructed into the analysis of the work?'

So the teachers and the people like Herb Kohl, Tod Gitlin and Troy Duster and Jeanette Getler (who was a television producer), came and talked to the teachers. The teachers then created a curriculum. They talked to the students and then, out of that, 40 kids came together. We said, 'Hey guys! We have this idea. Let's put all of you up on a roof talking about the issues that are important to you. Let's give you direct access to television cameras though we will mediate' Of course there are layers of mediation. Then one of the kids says, 'We don't have cars'. This then gets to the question of why is it art and not art – we launch into a complicated negotiation about whether they should sit in cars or in the park and what that means. It takes a month to have that conversation with the kids who are finally saying, 'Would you adults stop fighting! Let's sit in cars. She likes cars, let's go sit in cars.' Then there is a complicated discussion about whether or not the cars should be used cars or new cars. We try used cars. The kids say, 'No. Those are dirty. They smell. We want really great vehicles.'

Cars are basically a framing device – a mini stage to allow multiple private conversations to occur in a public setting. They are also the means to prevent the circulating adults in the team from impinging on the youth conversations. We literally had to drag people's heads

out of windows to keep them from saying, 'God dammit, you said blah, blah.' They didn't like listening to the kids. The kids' subtitle for the project was 'shut-up and listen'.

Everything, from the title to the use of cars, to what you wear, was part of the negotiation. The police were greatly involved in the conversation about whether or not they should be in uniforms. I considered this part of a visual arts conversation, because a lot of it was visual. It was how the visual represents meaning - to media, to the audience and to the people participating. The cops had a lot of discussion about how their role, with uniform or without uniform, had meaning. The discussion included the colour blue, the guns, the holsters, a lot of discussions about that kind of paraphernalia, the vests, the way they're tucked into the clothes. The kids had discussions about what they would wear. So these projects are the tip of the iceberg, as Grant said.

In the next seminar we will discuss the issues of display and subsequent representation.

Grant Kester's response

Possible tensions in the success of this practice: the UK and the US

>   **Grant Kester**: I'll talk a little bit about the nature of this practice in the UK in general.

>   I assume that this is connected to the success of things like New Labour and also, probably, discourses around the cultural industries and cultural capital, Richard Florida's work and a whole matrix of things that present culture as a new economic engine that will rescue languishing post-industrial economies from anachronism, etc etc.

>   Most of the projects that I'm looking at right now are not being produced in countries that are spending any money on art.

>   Certainly in the US, there is almost no money spent on contemporary visual art by the government, to speak of, certainly not community-based or activist art. So I still have to wrap my mind around the idea that you've actually got a government that will spend money on contemporary art of this kind. It would be interesting to understand more clearly the nature of the compromises involved in this.

>   This is something I hope to learn about, while I'm here and subsequently – what some of those tensions are. I can imagine that they flow along the trajectory of having work reduced to a kind of social provision. Now, to me the problem with that is the extent to which it functions as an alibi for the failure of the State to actually perform its necessary role vis-à-vis its regulatory or judicatory relationship to the market system. You find art being coerced into functioning as a prop for the privatisation process. That's where it starts to raise relevant political issues.

>   I would imagine that's the point of conflict for a lot of practitioners as well. So part of this has to do with the trajectory of neo-liberalism. Your comment about the police versus being on the dole – again, it illuminates the significant differences between practice in the UK versus the US, where we don't have welfare to speak of, any more. There's Aid to Families with dependent children (AFDC), but it has been cut to the bone. There is some money for food stamp programs, but the idea that people in the working class would actually go somewhere and get a cheque is hard to visualize because we've already been through this

– you know, going back to Reagan. Clinton's dismantling of AFDC was really the final death knell for a lot of forms of social provision.

Suzanne Lacy: They're working on social security, now.

Grant Kester: Yes, there are arguments to privatize social security and so on. Bush has eliminated the last vestigial expression of government as having any sort of controlling relationship to the private sector. I really hope that that is not going to be the case in the UK and EU. There was a hard-fought battle over the last century to create things like the eight-hour workday and workplace regulations and even the dole itself. If you look at the history of poverty policy in the UK going back to the Poor Laws and the Reformation of the Poor Laws in 1830s and 1840s, it is a fascinating history of struggle to win these concessions and to force the state to take on a regulatory relationship to the market system. It really saddens me to imagine that the UK will go the same the way the US went in this regard.

Forms of patronage: A critical view and a case for optimism

There will be no buffer between the individual and the private sector and so, when we talk about issues of patronage (to bring us back to the practice side), I think, 'Ok, well we have got the compromises and contradictions of state support' and then I think 'What are the other systems of patronage?' There are foundations, NGOs, universities, state agencies, welfare agencies. There are cultural tourism agencies and then there's the art market: collectors, the Saatchis, whomever it might be. My feeling is that obviously, each of those systems of patronage carries along its own set of compromises that the artist faces. When you are working for a social agency the compromises are different from the ones you face having your work bought up by Charles Saatchi or in having your work supported by a research university or a Kunsthalle or a Biennial. They're all going to entail compromises in some way or the other, but there will also be enabling potentials in each of those sites as well.

So part of me wants to be slightly more optimistic than people that actually live in this situation would be about the fact that there is money available. In a way it reminds me of the situation in the US in the late 1960s around the Office of Economic Opportunity. Community Action Programs were put in place, primarily as a way for the Democratic Party to peel off African-American voters from the Republican Party and to enfranchise what had became African-American working class neighbourhoods in cities. The Democratic Party, under Johnson, made a very concerted effort to found inner-city programmes, to cultivate votes, to enfranchise poor and working class populations. They proceeded through a principle that they called 'maximum feasible participation' which meant that the money should not go to the political machines that run city government, but directly to the grassroots level. This is where a lot of African-American politicians like Marion Berry and Julian Bond began their careers, in CAP- funded programmes of the 1960s.

What happened is that some of that money was used to organise tenants to go on rent strikes against public housing managers or to organize to support their interests in other ways. This is a really productive moment at which the role of the state in relationship to the private sector is on on the agenda and openly negotiated and debated. The unfortunate thing in our circumstances (in the US) is that we can't even have that conversation any more. We can't have a conversation about the role of the State in any meaningful way because the notion that the state's primary role is simply to support and buttress the market is so well entrenched. One encouraging aspect of the situation here is that the state will, at

least, acknowledge that it has an obligation of some sort. It opens up the possibility of creating some pressure on the political system.

The Oakland Dialogue questions and answers

1. "The perspective of community development"
- Damian Killeen

Damian Killeen (Core Group): My history is all in social action, social development of one kind or another. I responded to the structure that you have put around the issue of ethics. The discussion you were having is the same kind of discussion that I have heard many times over for many years within the community development, community action field. Reflective people and effective workers in that field will always be asking these kinds of questions about their practice.

One word that you didn't use, which might have been implied in what you were saying but would definitely be overt in that discussion, was the issue of power. This would be pretty soon on the table as being at the centre of what is being explored. I just make that observation.

On the aesthetic side, I was wondering whether, in my own work in the past, I have had aesthetic concerns. I was very interested in that description of what aesthetic meant because, given that description, yes, I absolutely do have aesthetic concerns - on all sorts of occasions where I am bringing people together where there is a purpose. The word I've written down here that you have used is 'transformational'. It could mean transformation of perception or feeling or relationship or it could mean something more concrete, a change in direction of action. Many people in community development, community education fields and so on will be concerned to create an environment in which people coming into a room or a space, experience some kind of difference from the normal which frees them up to engage with each other in different kinds of ways.

I was intrigued, right at the very beginning, by Suzanne's business of rearranging the chairs. I recognised that happening and I had a wicked thought - Was that an artistic act because it was performed by an artist? It certainly looked like the same kind of thing that I would often do…

Suzanne Lacy: It was the same kind of thing that you would often do.

Damian Killeen: [laughs] That's perfect. So, but I'm really just responding to what I've heard. I think that there are many people working who would not begin to describe their work as art. They wouldn't be looking for any kind of validation from the art world as to what they are doing. They would have a different related set of arguments, justifications (perhaps, is the word) for being concerned with the aesthetic in the way you described it – the bodily experience of people in space. They would certainly share this ethical agenda.

So, I am, at the beginning of this exercise, wondering where's the art? Or What kind of area is the art-life interchange? To me, the difference – one difference, rather, is the aspect of performance. I can think that towards the end of many projects that I am involved in, there will be some form of presentation of the project. Depending on the nature of the project, it may be very formalised in a conventional sense, or it may be something which people have put a lot of creative thinking into. How can we communicate with people differently about this? So there is an element of performance, but it isn't the intent that there will be performance at the end of it.

2. "Representation of the different constituencies"
- Jan-Bert van den Berg

Jan-Bert van den Berg (Core Group): I suppose I'm interested in this conversation that we're having about ethics and aesthetics in relation to an arts tradition when a lot of the work we're talking about is created with a whole range of constituent groups. Therefore it is slightly contradictory to then have a discussion around ethics and aesthetics only with one representative of those constituencies here.

3. "Representation of the artist - as author, catalyst, negotiator or medium?"
- Kerstin Mey

Kerstin Mey (Core Group): I think my observation was in a similar direction. I would like to summarise it as question. What precisely is the role of the artist in these processes? Is it as facilitator, a catalyst, a medium, a negotiator? How is that role being communicated in the dissemination and the representation of the project afterwards? It is in a way disseminated through a named artist – through a kind of signature artist practice, when in practice it has been a collaborative participatory project. What are the issues that arise out of that?

4. "What does it mean for the artist to reflect and evaluate on a project?"
- Venda Pollock

Venda Pollock (Core Group): I'm interested how you, Suzanne, go back now and reflect on your process with the individuals involved. From my point of view, I 'evaluate'- it is a word I don't like, but it is the easiest word. When I go back to art projects after they have happened and talk to the participants, it is in itself is a very loaded process. I am coming from a certain academic tradition or a position.

With one project I came in afterwards, they heard that I was from a university and that cast the participant in a certain mindset. The language you use has to be adapted so that the participants can feel that they can contribute to the dialogue.

In another project I'm looking at now, I am trying a different tack by being involved in the beginning. That has implicated me in the process, but it opens up a lot more avenues for exploration - trying different ways to get people to talk on a level they'll understand, using verbal or visual techniques.

So I'm quite interested in how you feel what your role is in going back to talk to them. Are you going back as an artist reflecting on your practice? Are you seen as an artist continuing a kind of dialogue that was established? Is the research in itself part of that kind of practice – that ten-year long trajectory? How does that fit in with the way you are thinking now?

5. "Aims and Expectations of participants"
- Kate Foster

Kate Foster (Core Group): My question is about aiming for results. When do you articulate your aims, if ever during the project? I've read or I've just heard that you simply aimed to deal with media literacy, not to touch the bigger problems. Then I think I heard later that you aimed for the result of improved training of police.

If your artworks, if your projects, do you have aims, what are the expectations of the participants when they join the artworks?

6. "Artists and State funding"
- Judith Stewart

Judith Stewart: I'm particularly interested in the way that Suzanne's practice has come from a socialist, feminist, activist-base that has shaped this way of working.

I am interested in the way that this area of work has been so effectively absorbed by the state in this country to the extent that there is an industry that has built up around it. There are a lot of artists who have gone into this way of working because it brings them an income. A lot of artists have found that where they have started off with ambitions for aesthetic and ethical aims, their work has been adopted and changed into something else. In working on certain projects like this, are we actually just working on behalf of the State to make good citizens who do as they are told? I

would also like to throw in a question to Grant about relational aesthetics, which is a big thing in the UK as well. I wondered how your version of aesthetics fits with that?

7. "Knowledge of the creative process and its reception in public space"
- Monika Vykoukal

Monika Vykoukal (Core Group): You were talking before about assessing the work or what the work is constituted of. These are both process of developing it and all the social things that actually happened even without taking in the spectators. Suzanne then touched upon the issue of us discussing its presentation in an art gallery. In a sense, the media is an interesting gap or difference between the performance and the theatrical side of the work, its huge choreography and how people relate to each other within the piece. I'm particularly interested in that aspect of Suzanne's work right now.

Also how do you actually assess the visible process, as an artwork? I presume you know because you are always assessing the representation of that.

8. "Group dynamics and the role of the artist"
- Roxana Meechan

Roxana Meechan (Core Group): I'm very interested in group dynamics and the artist perhaps setting out some structures, boundaries, for a particular group. Obviously, it is nice when, suddenly, the group takes over and somebody else becomes 'the artist'. Is the role of 'artist' something that is interchangeable between individuals?

9. "First contact with authority: the British picture"
- Ruth Barker

Ruth Barker (Core group): I just wanted to pick up on something that Grant said that actually really changed the way that I personally understood the Oakland projects. You said that the police are the primary point of contact with the State for the community, for the residents.

I'm from a slightly scummy kind of working class big housing estate in the north of England. The police are certainly not the major or primary point of contact. The police don't ever go there! It's actually really hard to get the police to come out. The primary point of contact is the 'dole' – the Social Security. You have to go every two weeks and sign on and you get your dole money. They don't even call your name. They call you a 'Job Seeker'. I think there is a really important shift – in the kind of power relationships that that embodies i.e. that difference that occurs where the police or the social benefits system are the primary point of contact.

10. "Ways of art living in the world"
- Janice Parker

Janice Parker (Core Group) I'm just thinking about how I know Suzanne's project and how it lives in the world. I'm wondering how and why different kinds of authorship or ownership come about. Does the work live in the world in different ways and different contexts? Do the police have a version of it? Does it live in the world in other ways? Does it exist otherwise?

Suzanne Lacy's Response:
1. "Power"
Suzanne Lacy: The issue of power is ongoing. It is as an ethical issue, one of the primary ethical issues. It is bound up with analysis. It is also involved in the process. I personally incorporated it into the work.

In the long trajectories of these pieces we focused in our discussion on Code33. This is interesting because it was the first place that the many, many conflicts inherent in the work came into the actual subject of the performance. They were only referred to in the other pieces because youth had a much more prominent voice. It also had something to do with the Free Mumia people showing up and how the whole thing operating as an arena of conflict.

I think it is important to constantly challenge that including the power of one's authority as the 'artist'.

2. "Academic Bias"
The second thing is just a brief aside on the notion of academic bias. I think there is only bias in this work. There is no way to have an objective reality. Anything I do with respect to recounting is biased and subject to a lot of decisions that I actually have to make. For example - Am I going to put the Free Mumia protest into my film, or am I not? Chris (Johnson) who in that piece, by the way, was called the 'Oreo' by the kids – they found him very inaccessible although, probably to you, he was highly accessible. Chris is the African-American self-educated, colleague of mine who started this whole process. I'm very clear about the way he and I represented a different kind of positioning vis-à-vis race and class and so on, which was opposite from the way the kids understood it.

In the case of me interviewing people, I am not going to people who particularly see me as an academic. They are my friends. I am only interviewing the 20 or 30people that carried through, over time, in various ways the division of the project.

Similar things are done in a lot of my projects, including a psychologist who looked at the language structure of kids in the groups and developed a Masters thesis on it, and so on.

3. "Aims and expectations of the work and its participants"
The aims, like the analysis, are developed in the process. That is, I have an intuition, then I get together with Chris, and he says, 'You know, I have the same intuition – Let's go find out what those kids are like'. Then we get a kid involved, and the kid says, 'hey, you better…' – Unique Holland was very good in this way.

In Roof is on Fire we met every week with a team of 40kids. They felt that they were the leaders. Out of that 40, there were ten who met and decided the questions. At the rehearsal, the adults took over. I turned into a militant general in the middle of a performance – 'Be there, do that ..'. The kids came up to us afterwards and said, 'Wait a minute. This is not cool. You need to include us all the way.' We explained to them that it was difficult to do so when you are representing the vision, the voice and the experience in the work and when you don't have art experience. There was a complex negotiation that went on around that point between the rehearsal and the performance. I'm not saying that either side had a complete autonomy, but it was a negotiation. It explains to you how the aims of the work and the expectations of the people entering the work are a much more open field than one might see from looking at the end result.

So, it's more like this. I say to Chris 'I don't know those kids. Do you?' He responds, 'I'm black. I'm from the poor neighbourhood, but I don't know them either, but I do know Amelia.' I ask 'What should we do?' He responds 'Well, let's go and teach in the local high school.' Six months later the kids have told us what they think. The teachers have told us as well. We all sit down and say, 'Well, maybe we should do something about this.' And then a local journalist shows up and says, 'I'm going to do a video of this. I'm so excited.' And you say, 'Hah! That's interesting. Let's expand it to eight other schools.' So we go to the school district and say –'Why don't you pay for eight teachers from eight different high schools to come once a month and talk to us not just about media literacy but about all kinds of aspects of the kinds of things that are eventually constructed into the analysis of the work?'

So the teachers and the people like Herb Kohl, Tod Gitlin and Troy Duster and Jeanette Getler (who was a television producer), came and talked to the teachers. The teachers then created a curriculum. They talked to the students and then, out of that, 40kids came together. We said, 'Hey guys! We have this idea. Let's put all of you up on a roof talking about the issues that are important to you. Let's give you direct access to television cameras though we will mediate' Of course there are layers of mediation. Then one of the kids says, 'We don't have cars'. This then gets to the question

of why is it art and not art –we launch into a complicated negotiation about whether they should sit in cars or in the park and what that means. It takes a month to have that conversation with the kids who are finally saying, 'Would you adults stop fighting! Let's sit in cars. She likes cars, let's go sit in cars.' Then there is a complicated discussion about whether or not the cars should be used cars or new cars. We try used cars. The kids say, 'No. Those are dirty. They smell. We want really great vehicles.'

Cars are basically a framing device – a mini stage to allow multiple private conversations to occur in a public setting. They are also the means to prevent the circulating adults in the team from impinging on the youth conversations. We literally had to drag people's heads out of windows to keep them from saying, 'God dammit, you said blah, blah.' They didn't like listening to the kids. The kids' subtitle for the project was 'shut-up and listen'.

Everything, from the title to the use of cars, to what you wear, was part of the negotiation. The police were greatly involved in the conversation about whether or not they should be in uniforms. I considered this part of a visual arts conversation, because a lot of it was visual. It was how the visual represents meaning - to media, to the audience and to the people participating. The cops had a lot of discussion about how their role, with uniform or without uniform, had meaning. The discussion included the colour blue, the guns, the holsters, a lot of discussions about that kind of paraphernalia, the vests, the way they're tucked into the clothes. The kids had discussions about what they would wear.

So these projects are the tip of the iceberg, as Grant said. In the next seminar we will discuss the issues of display and subsequent representation.

Grant Kester's response:
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2. "Forms of patronage: A critical view and a case for optimism"
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The Studio

The Studio is a learning space that brings to the foreground the experience of the core group participants. Each core participant was chosen by Public Art Research +Resource, Scotland and the OTE. The rationale for having 18 individuals tracking the whole process in a sustained effort is complex:

1. They enable Suzanne to understand something about the issues of our context as part of the dialogue of exchange.

2. In turn these individuals, who represent some of the most interesting current work in Scotland and further afield have close access to one of the most important artists and critical thinkers in this area of work in the development of her own research.

3. Each core participant has undertaken to cascade their experience back into their organizations.

4. Each individual is bringing a unique project – their experience of the work place to the learning space offering a range of contexts, approaches, roles (administrators/artists). This web of experience is prompting a great number of interesting questions.

The following material appears in the next few pages:

- Reference materials sent to the core group prior to the seminar
- Framework and key questions document sent to the core group prior to the seminar
- Reflection: Janey Hunt ('Ethical Statement' and 'Ethics and Aesthectics, Plus Social Change')
- Reflection: Kate Foster ('Working Sketch')
- Reflection: Monika Vykoukal ('Aesthetics and Ethics')
- Reflection: Ruth Barker ('Any Rules However, Were Made to be Broken')
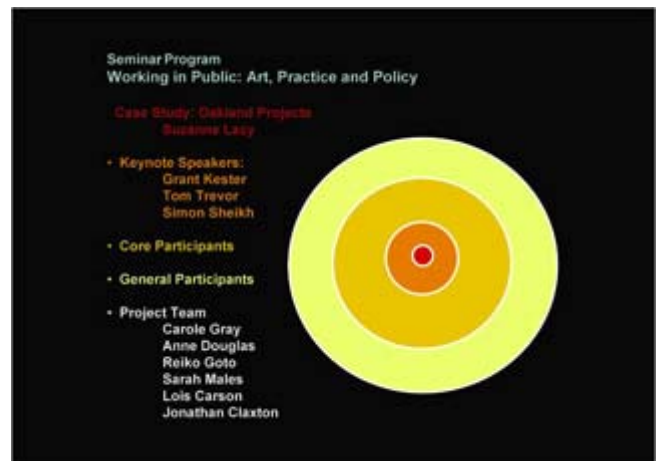
Seminar 1 Reading List

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        - Introduction, p.1-16
        -Chapter 3: Dialogical Aesthetics, p.82-123

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        - Kaprow, A. *Success and failure when art changes*, p.152-170
        - Lacy, S. *Debated Territory: Toward a critical language for public art*, p.171-185

        - Steinman, S. *Section Five: Directional Signs: A compendium of Artists' Works*, Kaprow, pp.247-   248, Lacy, Piper 251-253, 266-267

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        - Kester, G., *Conversation Pieces, The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art*. p.76-88

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Sheikh, S (2004) *Representation, Contestation and Power: The Artist as Public Intellectual* http://www.republicart.net/disc/aap/sheikh02_en.htm

Sheikh, S (2005) *In the Place of the Public Sphere?* http://www.societyofcontrol.com/research/sheikh.htm

Aesthetics and Ethics of Working in Public

We might say, with slight exaggeration, that we are experiencing an "ethical turn" in aesthetics and an "aesthetic turn" in ethics.

Mary Deveraux

The Philosophical Status of Aesthetics
http://www.aesthetics-online.org/ideas/devereaux.html

Ethics
Ethics guide social interaction, through a shared sense of good and bad behavioural guidelines.

When we work 'in relationship' do we need guidelines to encounter and manage difference?

Is encountering difference an opportunity for self interest or an opportunity for changing/interrogating how we think about 'self '?

If conflict is a condition of dominant and subordinate interests; are there ethical guidelines that could move conflict towards creative resolution? Or, is conflict an a priori condition of public life?

What kinds of ethical issues arise within practices that are focused by relationship more than authorship?

If consensus is the ideal outcome of public life; what moral and ethical guidelines do we need? Can consensus (relationship) and creativity (authorship) coexist?

Where and when do sensitive ethical issues arise in relation to work that is concerned directly with the social/cultural sphere?

If our life in the public realm is defined by the oppositional forces of conflict and consensus; is there an aesthetic condition that we might seek in that discursive relationship? Do complex relationship (familial, social, political) have an experiential and conceptual quality that you would define as aesthetic?

Aesthetics
Aesthetics is no longer defined as a material/formal condition that is intrinsic to the material/physical world. As the artists approach to the process of meaning making and engagement with the world changes: does aesthetics become more discursive and contingent? Is the formal material aesthetic displaced by the other; a discursive relational aesthetic?

A concept of empathetic insight is a necessary component of a dialogic aesthetics.
G. Kester 2004 p 115

If we once understood aesthetics as a formal order that was 'beauty' or an overwhelming power that was sublime - what is it that we share across art, culture and nature when enter into empathetic relationship? Or, inter-relationship?

What elements need to be present for an experience to be describable as aesthetic?

Have you experience beautiful and moving moments of conversation? What were the formal characteristics of that exchange?

Do we mean principles of art, semantic systems of art making?

Can you have aesthetic inter-relationship without empathy? Can you have an aesthetics without form? Do we focus our critical eye on the dialogue, or the setting in which that dialogue is occurring?
If the public sphere has alternating moments of conflict and conviviality (like any relationship!) do adjectives like utopian/distopian, ideal/pragmatic, discourse or lecture indicate hierarchical value?

What qualities/expectations emerge from aesthetics in contemporary practices/projects in the public sphere: utopian/distopian, ideal/pragmatic or discursive?

What is relationship between aesthetics and the everyday?
How do ethical issues shape a different sense of aesthetics?
Do ethical considerations limit aesthetic potential?
When is it appropriate for the artist/or art project to test thresholds?
What is the relation between art and aesthetics in working in public? For whom is the relationship relevant? And what for?

In an art practice that is based upon relationship - what is the focal point of aesthetic/critical analysis? How do we know when to look, do we look at all? Or are other senses involved?

When does art cross over into something else? What becomes of aesthetics in work that happens across time and within dialogue?

If we can consider aesthetics as a condition of a narrative, a play, or a symphony, is I possible to define an aesthetic of human inter-relationship where the outcome is mutual transcendence?

After watching Suzanne's DVD documentation of "The Roof is on fire" and "Code 33" I have questions. We all could think about Suzanne's project as case studies and we can compare with our own projects.

What does it mean to listen? In Suzanne's case what was the empathetic link to her speakers? How do we understand who 'they are' and prepare ourselves to listen well? Following that if a person doesn't speak is there still potential for listening?

In the documentation of "The Roof is on fire", a high school drama teacher said, "I don't want to see them (young people) made into an anthropological experiment…" The question was a moral and ethical one, about using community versus engaging with the intent to affect change.   What does this mean to an artist who works within community?

In the documentation of "The Roof is on fire", there are also audience comments such as "There are many difficult issues." Is their sense of difficulty the same as our sense of difficulty when watching the documentation? How might we discuss this gap?

Proposed Ethical Statement for Socially Engaged Art practice   *Janey Hunt*

If you would like to cite this material, please use the following:
Hunt, J, (2009 forthcoming), *Conversations: Investigating the 'value-action gap' through socially engaged art practice,* unpublished PhD thesis, Dartington College of the Arts.

1. Rationale
2. Underlying principles
3. Proposed code of good practice

1.   Rationale

The following statement is to make Dartington College, Plymouth University and the participants in my art practice and research aware of the ethical issues that arise from that research.

The research title is *Conversations: Investigating the 'value-action gap' through socially engaged art practice*. From an existing environmental art practice addressing contemporary issues, I wanted to investigate means of stimulating public questioning of life-style values in the face of climate change and contribute to the enquiry of art as a catalyst for engagement in the real world.

Sociological research identifies the phenomenon of the 'value-action gap' (Kolmuss and Agyeman 2002) in which environmentally sustainable behaviour acknowledged as needed, fails to be adopted, and Darnton (2005:51) calls for further qualitative research. Probing the 'value-action gap', I am using my art practice as qualitative method to involve participants in consideration of its effect and consequences. I will also address the problem of ephemerality inherent in socially engaged practice (Kester 2004:189) and by deploying research methodologies produce a thorough record of the artworks.

Participants will work with the artist and contribute to artwork through direct participation, questionnaires and interviews. Although initially directed by the artist, a more collaborative artwork could ensue.

This researcher felt it necessary to explore the issue of ethics in some depth, given the requirement to openly state ethical issues within research, the specific ethical nature of the research questions and the issues raised by a socially engaged practice and the nature of participant contribution to a personal art practice. The ethical statement below is therefore developed specifically for this research project.

I would welcome any comments or contributions to assist the development of this ethical statement and in exploring its impact on art practice.

There appears to be an inherent tension between sociological good practice as described by the British Sociological Association, paragraphs 20 - 25 (2004) (appendix 1) and the production of artwork. In terms of this research project this is in the area of Ownership and specifically in participant contribution and subsequent consultation to this researcher's artwork.

This researcher feels that an artwork once completed should not be revised. Also the degree to which participants can influence work in production, as implied by paragraphs 23 and 24 is a difficult question. Unfortunately Dartington College of Arts code does not offer guidance on this issue. The code of practice published by an – the artists information company relates directly to professional practice rather than a specifically ethical code and therefore only touches indirectly on the issues of a research based practice.

At this time, this researcher cannot resolve these issues, but will observe the practice of this ethical statement during the research. It is likely that in the light of the pilot projects and further consultation, this ethical statement will be revised.

2.   Underlying principles

This ethical statement follows the following general principles of Permaculture. These principles have been adopted because of the spirit of this research in particular:
- Earthcare
  'all actions shall be judged in accordance with the requirement that they either heal degraded ecosystems…(or) leave them substantially intact.'(Devon County Council, 1995)
- Peoplecare
  the development of a 'culture, which places great emphasis on the energy of mutual aid between people and communities.' (Devon County Council, 1995: 18)
- Fairshares
  Carrying capacity develops the ideas of an ecosystem that has a limited ability to support any one species, with the implication of the need to reduce our share to support the whole.

The headings below are taken from 'Ethical Issues in Analysis' (Huberman, 1994) which significantly build upon those outlined in the Dartington College of Arts –code of good research practice (Dartington College of Arts, date unknown).

3.   Proposed code of good practice

Competence boundaries
- I am prepared to study and be supervised by Clare Donovan and Tracy Warr.
- I am prepared to undertake training as identified in the Plymouth University Research Student Log Skills development skills audit (pp.47-52) and additional training as identified in discussion with my supervisors
- I am prepared to seek additional consultation and advice outside my immediate research team.

Informed Consent
- People taking part in the research are likely to be included as subjects, participants, collaborators or co-artists (referred to as participants hereafter)
- Participative artwork will be accompanied by a general contextual statement *(to be drawn up)* about the research, with further information available on a website and a sign saying that 'your participation may be documented'.
- All participants will be informed of the title, content and nature of my research through the attached statement *(to be drawn up)*

- Participation will always be voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time
- Participants should understand that their views and opinions may be used visually, audibly or quoted in the research. Completed artwork will not be altered. Participants will sign a release form
- Children will only be included with parental consent.
- Anonymity will be respected where selected
- Where the research is redesigned or altered during or following the research project, existing participants will be informed wherever possible
- Results and observations will be shared with participants during and at the end of the research in the form of a summary report
- Artwork will be displayed informally during the research and via a private view arranged for participants at the end of the research

Benefits, costs and reciprocity
- Currently this researcher is unsupported financially
- Participants will not receive any financial recompense
- Participants will benefit from insight into their understanding, consideration and implementation of sustainability

Harm and risk
- In a spirit of co-operation results and observations will be shared with participants as they occur

Honesty and trust
- The researcher is also a participant of the research and will always be super-critical of herself
- Results and observations will be shared with participants during and at the end of the research
- Participants will be acknowledged in the thesis, unless anonymity has been selected
- Other contributors and experts contributions will be acknowledged
- Artwork will be shown informally during the research and via a 'private view' arranged for participants at the end of the research

Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity
- Anonymity will be respected where selected
- Where possible participants specifically (rather than generally) represented in visual media will have given permission
- Participants should understand that their views and opinions may be used visually, audibly or quoted in the research. Completed artwork will not be altered
- Participants should understand that artwork may be displayed publicly, separately from the thesis
- All data (views and opinions) will be held by the researcher and will not be available outside of the final research report and artwork
- Participants should understand that the research will be published and exhibited
- Data (views and opinions) will only be shared with other researchers if they abide by this ethical statement

Intervention and advocacy
- Adverse opinions, where they may harm an individual or organisation, expressed during the collection of material will be considered for inclusion on a case-by-

case basis. They will not be included if they are libellous, unconstructive, illegal or unsupportive

Research integrity and quality
- Supervision of this researcher is provided by 2 supervisors, appointed by Dartington College of Art
- The supervisors and researcher are responsible to the research committee of Dartington College of Arts

Ownership of data and conclusions
- Participants should understand that their views and opinions may be used visually, audibly or quoted in the research
- The researcher will not distort or misrepresent the views and opinions of participants in the representation of the research (thesis or artwork)
- Completed artwork will not be altered
- Participants will be invited to contribute to the conclusion of the research, through their own reflection on the process
- Copyright of the research (field data, written thesis and artwork) will lie with the researcher
- If data sharing is requested by another researcher, all possible attempts will be made to contact participants to request their consent
- Electronic data will be stored with regard to the Data Protection Act, abiding by the removal of identifiers and use of pseudonyms with only indirect links between data and participants

Use and misuse of results
- Participants will be invited to contribute to the conclusion of the research, through their own reflection on the process
- Published evaluation of the research will help to expose the process
- Data (views and opinions) will only be shared with other researchers if they abide by this ethical statement

Complaints
Issues or complaints can be taken:
- In the first instance to the researcher (j.hunt@dartington.ac.uk)
- In the second instance to the first supervisor Claire Donovan (c.donovan@dartington.ac.uk)
- In the third instance to Dartington College of Arts Research Committee (a.payne@dartington.ac.uk)

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Appendix 1
Extract from British Sociological Association, (2004), *Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association, paragraphs 20-25*

20) Where there is a likelihood that data may be shared with other researchers, the potential uses to which the data might be put must be discussed with research participants and their consent obtained for the future use of the material.(iv). When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, sociologists should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording, and, as precisely as possible, to whom it will be communicated. It should be recognised that research participants have contractual and/or legal interests and rights in data, recordings and publications.

21) The interviewer should inform the interviewee of their rights under any copyright or data protection laws

22) Researchers making audio or video recordings should obtain appropriate copyright clearances

23) Interviewers should clarify whether, and if so, the extent to which research participants are allowed to see transcripts of interviews and field notes and to alter the content, withdraw statements, to provide additional information or to add glosses on interpretations

24) Clarification should also be given to research participants regarding the degree to which they will be consulted prior to publication. Where possible, participants should be offered feedback on findings, for example in the form of a summary report.

25) It should also be borne in mind that in some research contexts, especially those involving field research, it may be necessary for the obtaining of consent to be regarded, not as a once-and-for-all prior event, but as a process, subject to renegotiation over time. In addition, particular care may need to be taken during periods of prolonged fieldwork where it is easy for research participants to forget that they are being studied.

Working in Public presentation
Ethics and Aesthetics: (plus social change)

This paper is adapted from a presentation to the *Working in Public* Core Group (www.workinginpublicseminars.org), during the afternoon Studio discussion. This followed the public evening lecture by Grant Kester and the morning seminar, which took the form of a discussion between Grant Kester and Suzanne Lacy. The presentation was my response the theme of event 'Aesthetics and Ethics of Working in Public' and reflects my research in progress towards my PhD. The format of this paper combines the presentation I gave and aspects of the discussion that followed and reflects some thoughts on the lecture, it is a work in progress.

Within my socially engaged practice I still have a desire to produce work that has a recognisable aesthetic component. Nevertheless when viewing my most recent works people have argued with me that they are not art, and this does not discomfort me, (perhaps largely because I think they are wrong).

Kester suggests 'a redefinition of aesthetic experience as durational rather than immediate' (Kester, 2004:12), nevertheless I suggest, the examples of practice on which he draws in *Conversation Pieces* do have some aspects of traditional aesthetics. Through exploring the comparisons between Suzanne's work and mine, I want to raise questions about aesthetics and begin to consider how ethics could directly impact on practice. I suggest that when the aesthetic outcome remains important, this could provoke a clash with making work, which should also recognise and honour participant contribution.

> In his lecture Kester suggested a reversion of modernist theory, which had introduced a disassociation of the object from its context, back to a contextual and community essence of aesthetic.
>
> Significantly for many of us in the lecture this was an 'Aha' moment, when our understanding of aesthetic expanded to include not just durational, but also community as well.
>
> Please see the transcript of Kester's conversation with Lacy on the web site for an expanded explanation.

This paper, as a work in progress, in exploring both of these issues is offered for discussion, to explore, rather than to offer any fixed conclusions.

> "The artist relaxes their own point of view and allows other voices"
>
> Alastair Snow (Author's notes, *Hidden Spaces* Sept 2006)

I am not talking about community art practice as it is generally styled in the UK. This practice despite enabling change as a general aim, I understand as completely subsuming the artist's voice or personal aesthetic in service to the 'community' in which he/she is

working.

In my own practice, I aim to find a way to produce artwork that promotes social change, which allows a contemporary art aesthetic and engages people within an ethical basis. Reading the material from Working in Public and listening to Lacy's presentations it seems clear to me that Code 33 also shares these aims.

Image: *Code 33 logo*

I have recently written an ethical statement, drawn from sociology, anthropology and art practice. This will operate as a framework within which to conduct my research and art practice and allow participants to understand what they will get from participating and to be knowingly involved in and understand their contribution to projects. It will also help me to understand the nature of participant contribution to an art practice.

This has arisen out of three related issues: I am engaged in doctoral research, which requires an explicit acknowledgement of an ethical implication; my work is about individual social change, which could imply some responsibility for support; and a personal discomfort in making and documenting site specific art work, which occasionally felt like engagement under false pretences or deception.

Image: Detail from *Insufficiently Prepared Adventure: Escape to the Country* 2004

There is an inherent tension between sociological good practice as described by the British Sociological Association (paragraphs 20 – 25, 2004) and the production of artwork. These areas of tension are: Authorship and ownership of work; Participant contribution and subsequent consultation in the making of artwork with the implication of having to change work; Advising participants of their engagement in the work, specifically t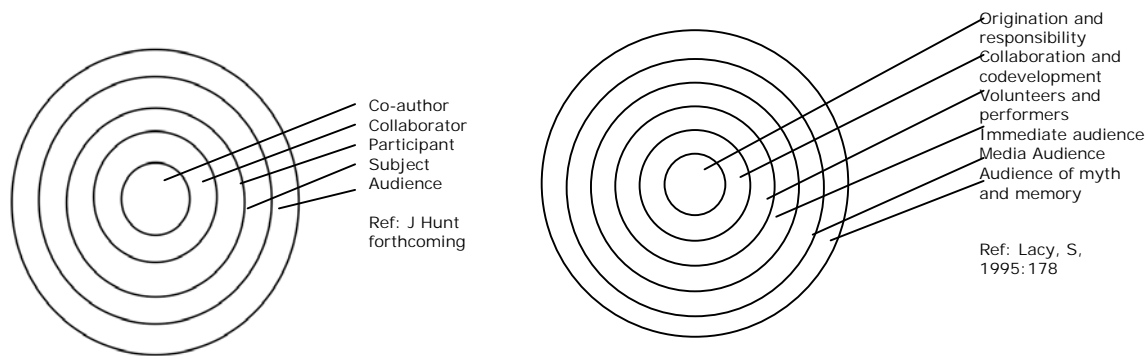hat their views and opinions may be used visually, audibly or quoted in the artwork or research. These tensions will be explored through the discussion of art works that follows.

In the diagrams below I compare Lacy's diagram of audience and my own breakdown of participation in an artwork. Lacy defines audience in terms of an 'evaluative construct' and therefore has more categories. (Lacy 1995:178) Nevertheless there are distinct similarities, which relate to responsibility. She describes the 'audience–centred model 'as 'non-hierarchical in intention'

and allowing 'continual movement back and forth' but with the 'more responsibility assumed (so then) the more central the participant's role in the generation of the work.'

Similarly to Lacy I had categorised participation in my projects. These are 'subjects, participants, collaborators or co-artists', which relate directly to the level of my responsibility to them as contributors to an artwork and their ability to influence the project outcomes. I do recognise her inclusion of 'immediate audience' as necessary for my model, because of their possible inclusion in documentation.

Lacy does not however link the level of engagement in a work with a greater role in determining the outcome and documentation of a work. This is a direct implication within my ethical statement.

Co-author
Collaborator
Participant
Subject
Audience

Ref: J Hunt
forthcoming

Origination and
responsibility
Collaboration and
codevelopment
Volunteers and
performers
Immediate audience
Media Audience
Audience of myth
and memory

Ref: Lacy, S,
1995:178

Bearing in mind an ethical framework for art practice lets look at *Code 33*.

Moira Roth in her narrative commentary on *Code 33* draws out the major goals of the project, which are to instigate change and are stated as 'facilitating meaningful dialogues for both youth and police, and involving local mentoring organizations and Oakland neighbourhood representatives.'

There is an implicit ethical framework in place for the work displayed within the documentation. This is reflected in the facilitated discussions between youth and police prior to the event; using the 'I' statement and allowing the discussions as a neutral zone; the guidelines for exchange on the night; and community mentoring to continue the work beyond the performance. Cameras and microphones clearly present during preparation and during the performance also imply an implicit permission given for public re-presentation.

But what of the rest of T.E.A.M (Teens, Educators, Artists and Media) who developed the event, which for Code 33 comprised over a dozen artists, although only 3 are credited on the film titles, plus all the others who participated?

Despite the clarity of the major goals, Roth notes some confusion of purpose within one section of the project, the community and neighbourhood representatives, who asked if this wasn't just making a film.

Another possibly unresolved issue is how the work was publicised. In a paradoxical statement Roth quotes a discussion prior to the event: '"Shall we call it an 'event' or a 'performance' on the poster?...the official designation for the October 7 performance artwork will be a "public event"'. (Roth, M 2001, *Evening, August 30*)   Is this a satisfactory ethical decision?

Suzanne Lacy: Code 33 brought together a complicated group of 100-150 people as a core group of artists, police, health workers, youth and educators. Code 33 built on activist base and local groups within community. Every project became more extensive to develop support systems and youth development systems. Didn't set out to hold performance, but it was a response that came out of research. The film does reveal the voices, but perhaps not the complexity of issues. Author's notes from Lacy's Presentation to Working in Public seminar April 2007

Janey Hunt: Thoughts during discussion on crediting all contributors.

In films all the workers have to be credited according to their contracts of work. What about doing this with art documentation.

How could this be arranged with varying degrees of input, 'eg Core group' and 'with assistance from...' or everyone in alphabetical order. What about those who don't want to give their names?

There is an emphasis on a traditional aesthetic, mentioned in Suzanne's presentation last week, where the hand of the artist is obvious. Roth again,
> 'I'm beginning to see the event in terms of color as well as sounds (cars, music and conversations) and movement (entries and exists, gestures, milling, and dancing). The reds and golds of the sunset. Red, white and black T-shirts and blue uniforms. Stark black-and-white cars and brilliantly painted low-rider cars.'

The film documentation that we have seen in the seminars is also presented in line with contemporary art documentation.

Recognition for the artist has come from a sustained interaction with Oakland over the period of ten years and built upon an already established practice including co-operative work at the Women's Building. However the scale of the event of 1,000 audience members, 250 performers, reporters and camera crews, and its successful execution would also have contributed to the artist's standing.

I should say that none of these comments above are raised as criticism and may be easily answerable, however they are raised in the context of this seminar's enquiry.

So what has happened in my own projects since I wrote my ethical

statement?

I have conducted two projects *Conscience Offsets* and *Eco-renovation: House Receipts* within my research framework to date. Both of these I instigated and conducted without any need for external input, but the audience needed to engage with the work directly to complete it.

Conscience Offsets

Image: Detail from *Conscience Offsets*, 2006

Concurrently with the development of *Conscience Offsets* I was writing my ethical statement. The work did not fit into the draft statement for a number of reasons. I did not advertise it as a work of art, ie there was no title clearly visible and I simply appeared on the street. The work did not have a traditional aesthetic and looked more like market research. There was a poster advertising the whole exhibition of which this was one work, which I very discreetly displayed. The fact that my project was near by another artwork of a more obvious aesthetic may have allowed people to draw the conclusion they we were part of the same art event. No one asked if my piece was an artwork. The documentation of the work is through photographs taken on site and publication of the written contributions, reflecting each site in which the work took place.

I did not clearly state that participants might be photographed, or that the written comments and conversation might be re-presented or published in any way. However I was inviting written comments to be pinned up, readable by anyone who passed by and that would imply an implicit agreement for public re-use. Nevertheless I recognise that this course of action would not fit my ethical framework. In my categories of engagement some of the audience would be classed as subject/participants by contributing comments.

Eco-renovation: House Receipts

As a gallery installation this project was easier to accommodate within my ethical statement. The poster and statement displayed within the gallery clearly advertised participation as part of the work and actively invited contributions to the work, both written, visual and conversation. The

documentation was undertaken when the gallery was empty.   However there was no clear statement about the nature and rights of participation, although this was implicit in the work. The engagement in some instances influenced the direction of the work as it progressed during the week, characterising it as participant. I would not categorise it as collaborative, because the influence was indirect and developed after the contribution and a period of reflection by myself. My conclusion was to consider in future a clear statement outlining the nature and rights of participation, which could then be displayed alongside this installation, in whatever context it might appear.
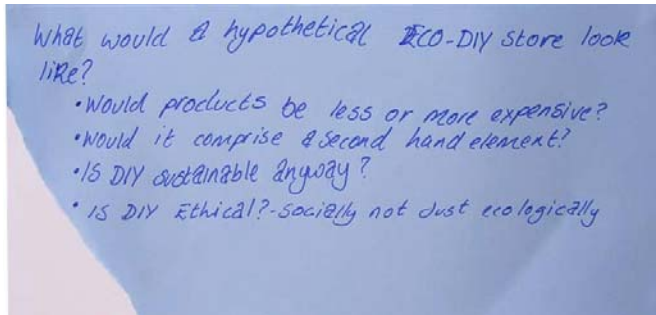

Image: Details from *Eco-renovation: House Receipts*, 2006

Aesthetically the work had a pleasing look on a macro level with colour coding and placement in the gallery and at a micro level where more detail revealed the process. However a number of comments queried this as art, although one eco-architect said he was delighted that some-one was finally looking into the user experience as opposed to the theoretical practice of architecture. I am still developing this work and plan to insert images of the house and eco-additions in a future installation.

Conclusion:
I cannot yet put forward a conclusion about incorporating an ethical statement into art practice, but only raise questions and invite discussion. I also understand that I need to undertake more research in order to ascertain

sociological and anthropological approaches when interviewing perople in order to trial them as part of my art practice.

Is it possible to balance personal aesthetic standards, allowing participant achievement and balanced within an ethical framework? I'm still working on it.

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As an addendum to the above I also offer the following:
Another approach to an ethical statement eg. Croatian artist Kristina Leko, *What should I do? An ethics for artists in twelve simple rules (2004)*, www.shiftingground.net/kristinalekopres.htm accessed 18 March 2007

And what impact on documenting art practice would the following proposal that the UK government required photographers to carry ID in order to operate in a public place?

From: roland.buckingham@KCL.AC.UK
Subject: Gov petition against restrictions on photography
Date: 18 March 2007 13:45:49 GMT
To: ART-VISUAL@JISCMAIL.AC.UK
Reply-To: roland.buckingham@KCL.AC.UK

"There are a number of moves promoting the requirement of 'ID' cards to allow photographers to operate in a public place.
It is a fundamental right of a UK citizen to use a camera in a public place, indeed there is no right to privacy when in a public place.
These moves have developed from paranoia and only promote suspicion towards genuine people following their hobby or profession."
It's not made clear exactly what moves are afoot, but if you would like to sign the on-line Gov petition against such restrictions you can do so at:
http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Photography/

Working sketch: May 2007

on Aesthetics and Ethics of Working in Public
Kate Foster

This is an early sketch of an essay as a response to the first seminar of a programme organized by On the Edge and the Scottish Arts Council in 2007.

This is work in progress and ideas are developing - which should be noted should this work be cited. Please contact the author for permission to use this work in another publication. Likewise the images cannot be used without permission (with one exception - the drawing "I can think what I like" may be used freely.)

Starting point - some concerns

As a starting point, these were the main things I wanted to think about in the seminar series.

• Today's pressing environmental issues mean that work concerned with social justice should also challenge environmental injustice. Everyone - especially in the rich world - has to question the social and environmental impact of our use of resources.

• The time taken to build relationships to make 'Conversation Pieces' can feel like a painfully slow kind of politics in an era with urgent need for action. Still - if this trouble isn't taken - then individual artists' contribution is bounded.

• Artists work with expert knowledges in different ways. A choice to do joint-work demands mutual respect and preparedness to change your approach - an ethic that needs marginal spaces.

• I would like to see a shift of aesthetics towards a 'make-do' approach - adapting to local resources and local materials, working on local connectedness.

welcome to my field

Image 1: Welcome to my field. Book cover. Kate Foster.

Early response to some issues raised by Seminar One

Seminar One was introduced by the idea that when working in public, *"the artist's role lies in constructing spaces and processes that enable us to think critically, as well as playfully, as individuals."*

be more productive

be more creative

in your field

As a new artist, finding personal pathways to work outwith the gallery and with different audiences requires making decisions, each bringing its own consequences. For example, I have to deal with how to work adjacent to academic enquiry. My working process is to seek different perspectives on various specific topics. Trying to make sense of environmental issues led me to work with geographers and biologists, whose expertise and support has been invaluable encouragement. I aim for sustained cross-disciplinary work with supportive networks in order to develop shared interests. I have had to try to explain what I did, and identify a "field" of interest.

Making a field, or even a lawn, takes a lot of work and then it needs maintaining. I can see the appeal of ready-made fields, but they just aren't quite so interesting. One frustration I have with the field I drew is that it is rather a light green - it could be a deeper shade of environmental commitedness.

My field is at mean sea level - which as everyone now knows is not a fixed point. "Meansealevel" is a heading for ongoing projects, which explore the entwined lives of humans and animals in an age of species loss, and the complexity of people's relationship to environment - not just technically, but ethically. This work is about finding routes into looking at the enormity and complexity of our global environmental crisis. Working creatively with other people helps find ways to engage.

The introduction to Seminar One continued: *"We become aware that individuality itself is inextricably bound to the social and the political."*
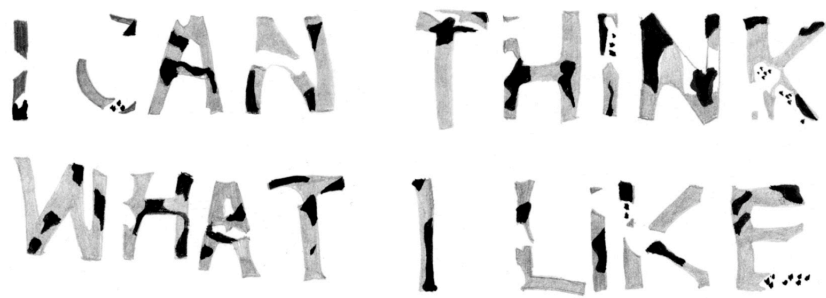

Image 2: Think what you like - a piece that can be completed by colouring in your own camouflage.

This image is "Figure 2" in a forthcoming article in Cultural Geographies, as part of a series about Cultural Geographies in Practice. It is called "Some reflections on art-geography as collaboration" and is by Hayden Lorimer and myself. It was tricky to find a form of words stating that this idea belongs neither to Sage Publications nor to us as authors.

This piece began as a stitched letters on cloth, themselves made of camouflage, which was first displayed on a noticeboard when I was resident artist in the Department of Geographical and Earth Sciences at the University of Glasgow. Anyone should be able to think what they like, but is constrained by experience and context. Having become immersed in the setting, I found it hard. It took a while to remember what my field is, to gain confidence in personal responses and to be less hesitant in referring to my own experience. The milieu supported certain kinds of expert knowledge and disciplinary infrastructures support particular kinds of individuation. In short, what I think is shaped by where I am and what is expected of me.

Image 3: I can think what I like - the original work on a noticeboard in Department of Geographical and Earth Sciences in the University of Glasgow

I learnt new nations have developed military camouflage patterns to forge identity. Apart from each other, people have hunted deer and antelope for millennia. Illustrations of these animals usually have them all facing right. In the drawing below, each sports its national camouflage.

Image 4: Camouflage Herd

As a final quote from the seminar introduction: *"Being present within art experiences we act an interlocutor, taking part in a dialogue the artist has helped construct."*

I brought a particular project to the seminar series to think about. Recent collaborative work re-mapped the history of an extremely rare skull of an extinct animal from South Africa - the Blue Antelope. This is a very rare specimen held in Glasgow University, but 'placing' this skull is particularly complicated given colonial and environmental histories, as well as present realities. The next step is make a physical version of the project website (a portable museum) to where the animal used to live, trying to create conversations about what it used to be called and what would happen if it magically reappeared. To quote from work with Hayden Lorimer: *"By which world should the Blue Antelope be known? By what territorial arrangement should we place it? And according to whose voice, language and values?"*
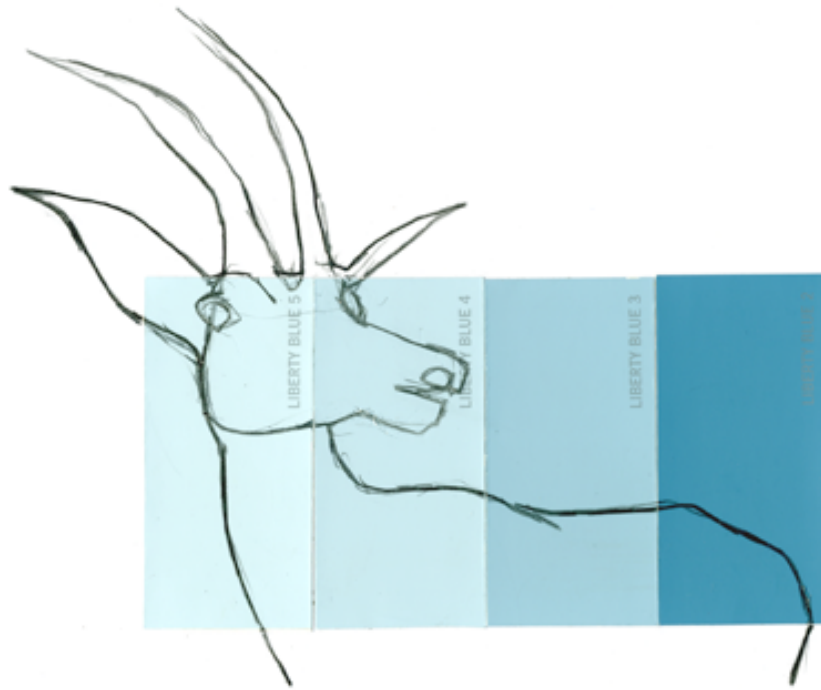
Image 5: Blue Antelope / Shades of Liberty

My self-set "job" as an artist seems to be to follow leads for investigation, make links, look for ways of making and showing new work, try to make the process enjoyable for others, and to be persistent. Much work has been informal, but being Leverhulme Trust Artist in Residence in the University of Glasgow (2005-2006) greatly helped - not least because it gave thinking space, it was steady income, and I had access to institutional infrastructures. The trick to learn is to keep thinking what you like.

Artist's website: www.meansealevel.net
Project website: www.blueantelope.info
Contact: art@meansealevel.net

Monika Vykoukal – Working in Public
Aesthetics and Ethics
pARTners Residency, Eva Merz

At the beginning of the New Social Art School book 'Get a Fucking Job'(1) is the quote:
"I don't think one can claim to be 'objective' if one doesn't constantly look at society from the point of view of the lowest positioned. The journalist who tries to balance the view of the rich with the view of the poor has already accepted this unequal division and justified it, and is therefore part of the oppression."
-Jacob Holdt, American Pictures

I am quoting this here, because Holdt's statement seems to suggest the focus of Eva Merz's work and her relationship to the potential participants in her work.

I did not pick this question initially, because I always thought I find it difficult to see 'ethics' and 'aesthetics' as separate (if I manage to hold some definition of those terms to begin with). Also, I will talk about my chosen example again, our artist residency, pARTners which raises a few issues: One, it is still in progress, only 3 months of the total 18 month (encompassing 3 six-month residencies) have passed; two, I am not the artist, but as curator functioning more as an administrator. I am largely talking about somebody else's work (not about ethics and aesthetics in the administration, or hopefully support of this, which is my role, really). Briefly my approach has been to be there if needed (I hope) to help with practical things and to discuss, but not to proscribe anything. I also feel it is the artist who has to establish relationships with collaborators herself and chose who this could be, rather than me. I do have some obvious political positions as an individual, so they have an impact on what values I bring to art and work.

What has happened so far?

The aims of the project as set by the funder, Scottish Arts Council, are:
> Partners is a National Lottery-funded initiative giving communities with little experience of the arts new opportunities to engage with professional artists. The partners programme supports artist residencies lasting from 3 months to 2 years. The artist(s) should be based in, and work in collaboration with a local community in Scotland. (2)

December the 1st the 'Partners' residency programme starts within an area of Aberdeen facing regeneration to encourage varied, local communities to participate in the arts. Three artists will each work and live for six months in the area. Eva Merz is the first artist-in-residence. This residency is a Peacock Visual Arts project in partnership with Station House Media Unit (SHMU). SHMU is located in Woodside, one of the areas the residency is based in. It aims to encourage and promote filmmaking, radio, and magazine development in and around some of Aberdeen's most deprived areas.

The areas the residency will focus on, Fersands, Tillydrone, Middlefield and Woodside, are among the most deprived areas of the city. These areas have been involved in several government regeneration programmes over the past 20 years. While there have been improvements, there are still challenges to be met.

November: Eva moves into a council flat in one of the areas, Tillydrone. Council Statistics (Tillydrone Neighbourhood profile):
> Tillydrone recorded the second highest rate of drug possession in the central area [of Aberdeen]…and the highest vandalism rate… the highest rate of domestic housebreaking…Second highest percentage of council housing tenants, more than 4 times of city-wide unemployment average, low income, teenage mothers etc.

Red Hearts

Eva got to know the area (walking, taking photographs, meeting people in daily live – shops, hairdressers, etc.) rather than in formal settings (community centres, organised social activity provided by the city's services). While taking photos on her walks, she noticed the proliferation of signs:'No Ball Games', 'No Exercising Pets\ etc. – There are 62 in the neighbourhood, a 'unique' feature in the city. On 14 February she put red vinyl hearts over them (which she took off again in the following days).

This was Eva's first big public outing in her residency. It is obviously different from the dialogical and collaborative focus of others of the talks in the seminar. I''ll try suggest some of its meanings. By this individual intervention in public space, placing an object (in this case, as she is keen to emphasize, a message of love), Eva is inviting a reaction. Her work is in response to a visual element that defines the geographic community by the same authority that collates the statistical evidence and supports the residency. I would suggest that by 'crossing out' the council message, she obviously also articulates conflict and disagreement, although quite sweetly.

The work employs the visual language and means of street art: repetition-mapping, readability, illicit and anonymous yet personal take over of public space; can be associated obligely with the visual language of iconic city branding (I 'heart' New York); is highly noticeable and can be read quickly by the potential viewer as they are on their way through the streets of Tilly. The vinyl hearts are both a classic Valentine's message and a protest of the (still readable) signs. Given the focus on vandalism and graffiti as perceived problems in the area (and the city) by the council, the attitude the hearts manifest is not one of building consensus in line with policy, but one of conflict and questioning of the articulation and definition of the city, the citizens and our problems by those in power.

The signs are reaching out, communicating to the public in the area. They aim to express a position and start a discussion. They not only try to say "love you', but they also simply say 'I am here'.The media response and individual responses of local people where overwhelmingly positive. The council followed with an equally positive response – it turns out some people at the council are trying to find a way to remove the signs, or to change them into something else as it might be too costly to remove them.

Meeting People

Since moving to Tillydrone in November last year, Eva has been inviting people to her house – friends, neighbours, guests, council employees, staff from Peacock Visual Arts and SHMU. Every visit is documented in a photograph of the guests at the living room table in front of the drawn curtains. Photos of all the 'No Ball Games' signs before and after and the growing collection of visits are put up on the walls of the living room. The visits and meetings are only documented in photographs – capturing them in the same place, Eva establishes a fleeting equality between her visitors as she puts them all in the same position as a guest at her table.

Comments/Questions/Notes

What kind of socially engaged practice does Eva's activity embody?

The artist acts as an individual, as a resident and neighbour - not as social worker. The context of a lot of the interactions is the private space of her flat, informal encounters in the street and in everyday life, not the formal settings for art. This brings some obvious issues around distinctions with it: What is and is not part of the work? What is the distinction between Eva the private individual and Eva Merz, profession: artist? Does the work imply a desire to disolve such distinction between professional, implicitly detached practice, separate from a private life and particular, personal preoccupations? Yet, the other side of those desires is are questions on the fusion of work and leisure from the perspective were all becomes work and the artist functions as a service provider. This is a danger, at least from the perspective of the aims of funders that frame the residency in terms of specifici social agendas, where the artist could even be seen to be expected to replace lacking social provisions through their individual creativity. Yet, Eva's work is distinctly personal, not agenda driven. It clearly presents her position, and does not claim to produce a representation of the will of the community, or to present people with 'the truth'. It is just as much an investigation of their viewpoint and living conditions, based on the idea of learning together.

Using the means of street art all around the streets of the area, the work is, most probably, not read as art at this point, but as a sudden, anonymouse gesture or intervention commenting upon the council signs. Removed from the art context, the gesture might have more of an immediate impact, be more effective as a protest of the signs and a gesture of comittment towards the other people living in the area (3).

On another level, Eva Merz's approach also investigates notions of community. The community of the residency is initially defined geographically and chosen in relation to statistical data on relative 'deprivation' in this area of the city. On the ground – just as in any place – this notion is complicated by the diversity of particular individuals, groups and interests, with tensions, for example, between families with children and drug dealers; or generational conflict (rumour has it this is the historic impulse behind the No Ball Games sign). By getting to know people in the area, the artist's endeavour is one to find out what the community is, and she is doing that as process of dialogue and investigation - her as stranger - rather than through pre-existing definitions by the authorities, or by targeting specific groups (exclusively or for focus on their issue). Rather, she is looking very much at the relationship between herself and the community and – secondarily - the organisations in the area and the council's definition of this context (which she is in open conflict with).

How does this practice relate to the common expectations of such a residency? The funders' aims – and countless policy documents - seem to suggest the participation of people living in this deprived area in some form of art making will help to produce consensus between residents and, somehow, make their individual lives and the area better, at least in their perception. In Eva Merz's residency, however, communication is not at the outset, or primarily, seen as a source for deliberation leading to consensus, but as a way to investigate the situation through listening to the actors on the one hand; as an articulation of dissent, and potentially open conflict on the other. On the ground, this attitude is based on the artist's of

living and working in the city for some years and her experiences in previous projects, in particular 'Get a Fucking Job' an investigation into street begging in Aberdeen, together with Bob Steadman (which resulted in a book of interviews with people involved in various ways with begging, and in particular beggars themselves). Her findings about the lack of sufficient support through social service provision by the City Council to help beggars and address the causes for their situation, and the council's lack of reaction to her work, informed a critical stance with regards to their support of poorer, homeless, or people addicted to illegal drugs in the city and investment in the areas which they live in.

As Eva says: 'One of the first things I noticed when I came to Aberdeen is that there is a big difference between people who have money and people who don't, rich and poor… that's one thing. (…) I want to look at where they are failing and to find out what local people think about the problems, but it's also important to highlight the positive things in the community."

By approaching the work with people in 'an area of deprivation' from an openly personal manner, Merz's practice also thematizes professional distinctions, and relations between individuals and society, between private lives and the space of politics. In her work, she seeks to impact the issues under investigation beyond their representation as art.

1. Get a fucking job. New Social Art School, Aberdeen 2006. p. 1

2. Scottish Arts Council, http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/professional/partners.aspx

3. www.communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=1686&sID=387

4. This argument was put forward by Stephen Wright in a talk focusing on the invisibility of certain 'activist' art practices, such as those of Grupo de Arte Callejero and the Yes Men, at the moment and site of its initial manifestation as crucial to the impact of the work at the symposium 'Transformations of Public Space', organised by the Professorship of Art in Public Space at the Stedelijk Museum CS Amsterdamin (February 15. and 16. 2007) - http://www.lkpr.nl/index_en.php?page=symposia

Andy and Monika

Tillydrone House

Any Rules However, Were Made to be Broken:
Questions of Aesthetics and Ethics in Contemporary Public Art Practice

Public art, as a movement, as a genre, as a category of contemporary art practice, is currently undergoing a period of re-investigation. What can it mean to make 'public' art? And is that the same as making 'art' public?

As the practice of public art addresses the terms of its engagement with both audiences and with the wider field of art itself, the internalised balance that it frames – that tentative, delicate equilibrium between ethics and aesthetics – remains a state of tension. I hope here to wobble the surface of this balance somehow, and to ask perhaps how it is weighted.

An indication of this state of semi-symbiotic fluidity may be found in the difficulty of satisfactorily defining any of these three terms – public art, ethics, aesthetics, – in isolation from the other two. To start with, any attempt to define public art as a practice runs the same risk of instantaneous historiography and redundancy as the attempt to define art itself. As a system of interrogation, art constantly redefines (and often negates) itself in the constantly advancing moment of the *avant-garde;* in public art no less than in gallery practice. As the US theorist Grant Kester reminds us in *Conversation Pieces* (2004):

> "*For Lyotard, as for Greenberg, art is caught in an eternal treadmill of (formal) innovation and assimilation. Moreover, to the extent that an appropriative consciousness feeds on difference, the* avant-garde *work of art ends up supplying this very tendency (embodied in the discourse of art history), with its initial frisson of resistance and its eventual consumption as reified style.*"

However, whereas Kester's text suggests a certain Sisyphean fatalism to this process, this cusp of *avant-gardism* can also be understood in more heroic terms. To strive constantly toward reinvigoration through reappraisal is to refuse to accept any truth as universally acknowledged. After all, in Thierry de Duve's terms "the *avant-garde* sets the

direction where history will follow."[1] The *avant-garde* may be conceived as the moment at which a previously un-thought, never before articulated position is made palpable. This moment is has the potential to be an uncomfortable one for both artist and viewer as the 'initial frisson of resistance' that Kester allows has historically often taken the form of vitriolic or even violent rejection. Rather than necessarily always being an intention of *avant-garde* practice however, in practice this rejection often results from the very newness of the freshly attained position and the negation of that which was previously received. Often the lack of a language appropriate to describe the newly conceived, coupled with this implicit undermining of a generally assumed position, engenders discomfort on the part of viewers or peers, even triggering the defensive mechanism of attack. In his text 'Art Was A Proper Name'[2], De Duve suggests the figure of a 'historian of the *avant-garde'* who sees:

> *"...a philosophy of history for which there is no definition of art except the historical process through which art negates itself and comes to terms with its own negation... It never constitutes itself a patrimony but projects the heritage of the past into the future in order to contradict it. When you call this process art, you mean that we, humans, don't need to agree about what art is. On the contrary, we need to struggle for what art should be. Some fight for one conception of art, others for another; yet we all stake a claim to what art ought to be for all of us. When you identify art with avant-garde art and with the avant-garde exclusively, you imply that **conflict and contradiction are the very fabric of art."** [emphasis mine]*

It is clear then, that first and foremost public art must be understood as a kind of art, but that art itself is impossible to define either **a)** *inclusively* (eg. Art *is* the making of images, objects, conversations, sounds, juxtapositions, smells, or ideas) or **b)** *exclusively* (eg. Art is *not* commerce, science, music, politics, literature, fashion, philosophy, war, or advertising). Such definitions are problematic because new practices presently unimagined may involve:

a) Something not included in the current conception of what art is, or
b) Something that is included in the current conception of what art is not

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[1] De Duve, Thierry, Art Was A Proper Name, in *Kant After Duchamp*, October Books, 1997.
[2] ibid

unless we accept the internal/external definition (fought over by Joseph Kosuth et al in the 1970s conceptualist debate) that art is what is art and art is not what is not art. What then, makes public art distinct from other branches of art? The most banal definition is that public art refers to all art that is not contextualised by an art gallery. The very fact that this is perhaps the most facile of definitions in functional terms renders it flexible enough to encompass a wide variety of practice. It also suggests something of the spectrum that public art covers, from the very public to the hardly public at all; from the self-directed gesture of the artist-interventionist, to privately commissioned 'broaches on the bosom of architecture'[3], to art as activism, to large-scale publicly funded socially engaged projects, and to everything else in between. In loosely accepting the definition that 'public art is all art that is not contextualised by a gallery', we can move on to question a perceived balance between the notions of the ethical and the aesthetic[4] within that practice.

The spectrum of public-ness indicated by the definition above becomes crucial when interrogating the place of the ethical or the aesthetic within public art practice and discourse. To consider the implications of the presence of an ethical sphere first, we must *a priori* have a working understanding of what we might mean by the term 'ethical'. Ethics might firstly be summarised as a system of how persons ought to act, although this superficial deliniation is not by itself sufficient to shed light on a relationship to the production and distribution of art. Certain branches of philosophy on the other hand, have for decades been unpicking the more sophisticated implications of ethics, and it so it may be germane to borrow some of their terms.

Many philosophers distinguish two views *of* the subject of ethics and two views *within* the subject of ethics. Broadly, in views *of* ethics, *deontologists* such as Kant and Pritchard prioritise duty over value; while *teleologists* have a more utilitarian out-look, seeing duties in terms of their end result of producing or distributing value. This distinction is reflected in the two groups into which questions of ethics might be distinguished, and which become relevant in plotting a relationship between public art and an ethical sphere. These two groups are *philosophical ethics* (pertaining to

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[3] As eloquently suggested by lecturer and educator Tanya Eccleston.

[4] This definition also has implications for the many 'off-site' projects now commissioned by galleries, suggesting that 'off-site' work is only truly public art if it is not visually or conceptually contextualised by the gallery that has commissioned it in any way – through signage, logos, interpretive strategies, etc. – even if the work is not sited within the gallery as such.

conceptual questions that may incorporate other branches of philosophy) and *normative ethics* (pertaining to actual moral issues either arising or hypothecated).[5]

'Does public art have an ethical duty?' is a deontological question of the normative ethical sphere. An initial teleological question raised by philosophical ethics is whether, for a public artwork to *be* a public artwork, it must have an ethical dimension.

This distinction between the normative and the philosophical clarifies the deontological / teleological separation that must be made between the notions of duty and value as applied to art. In the question of philosophical ethics above, the artwork's teleological value may be understood as either its value *as art* (i.e. is the artwork a good work of art or not) or alternatively, its value *as an action irrespective of art content* (i.e. is the artwork a good thing regardless of whether it is good art or not). The normative question in contrast hinges rather more on the process rather than the product: by drawing the focus to the deontological issue of duty, the question replaces the notion of results with the notion of intention.

To tackle the question posited by the structure of philosophical ethics, it is clear that the pivot is essentially a point of definition. For the purposes of this short text, I will restrict the conversation to discuss the value of art *as art*.[6]

> "*Conflict and contradiction are the very fabric of [some] art.*"[7]

If this statement is accurate, then it follows that some public artworks must contain qualities that may engender or provoke such conflict, in order that the field of art as a whole can advance through the presence of its *avant-garde*. Rather than an ethical dimension being a necessary (if not sufficient) component of an 'art condition'[8], we may therefore suggest that it is legitimate for some public artwork to explicitly challenge accepted ethics. The inference here however, is that most artworks *are* undertaken with regard to an ethical framework to inform decision-making, as the *avant-garde* only exists as a condition imposed on some works due to their particular relationship to the

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[5] This is a hurried overview of a vast and complex field of inquiry. My hope is merely to sketch in some navigational markers that may help to orientate the discussion.

[6] It is evidently true that many artworks also have a broader social value. However, to categorise them as artworks, we must first agree on the conditions of their status as art. The artwork's impact in other spheres is an outcome of the artwork's existence; if the impetus for the artwork's generation is an intention to produce art, then this is the primary aspect that must be qualified.

[7] The insertion is mine, intended to reflect de Duve's qualifier that this statement is true only when art is identified with an avant-garde.

[8] See Kosuth, Joseph, Art After Philosophy,

broader context of the field. If *avant-gardism* incites a rejection of the ethical, we may assume that for the majority of contemporaneous practices the ethical is seen as a pre-requisite, to a greater or lesser degree.

We may conclude therefore that in these terms, for a public artwork to be a public artwork it is *not* necessary for it to posses an ethical conception, but that many public artworks *are* nevertheless developed with regard for ethical principles. Acknowledging that many (though not all) artists do practice within an ethical framework, we may seek clarity in the case of any individual work, by asking:

1. What are the criteria (and perimeters) of the artwork's ethical framework?
and
2. How, when, and by whom have the criteria of the ethical framework be identified?

Because ethics as a notion exists in relation to principles of morality, ethics can never be a universal code. In discussing the ethics of an individual artwork however, those ethical principles must be contextualised by the recognition that 'ethics' cannot be embedded in any object, image, or gesture. Ethics, as a series of priorities that inform actions, can only ever be attached to behaviour and intention and, as such, are the preserve of the artist rather than the artwork. It is the intention to torture rather than the object of the thumbscrew that is *ethically* abhorrent. Questioning the ethical dimension of a public artwork must then be undertaken in relation to understanding the artist's intentions, in addition to the evaluating the end impact of the work. There cannot be a valid presumption of artists' personal ethical compasses, as the ethical compass of any group cannot be generalised.

At the core of this suggestion is that it is necessary to shift ethical responsibility away from the artwork and towards the artist who may *or may not* choose to accept that responsibility. This move exchanges the abstract notions of 'ethics' and 'art' as two immense quandaries, for a more concretely imagined example that raises ethical issues – the realm in fact, of the normative rather than the philosophical.

The normative question previously identified focuses on public art's ethical duty. In the light of the above, this can now be amended to ask whether artists who produce public work have an ethical duty. It might be answered as the following:

– Are the artists who produce public work human beings?
– Yes.

- Do human beings have an ethical duty towards other human beings?
- Yes, I believe they do.
- Do human beings always fulfil their ethical duties towards other human beings?
- No, they don't.
- Do artists who produce public work always fulfil their ethical duties towards other human beings?
- No. Sometimes they try to do so and fail. Sometimes they do not try to do so.

The artist may feel that their ethical duty towards fellow humans is at times outweighed by other factors including but not limited to: the artist's duty to art; their self preservation; their commitment to a career; their lack of resources; their anger at a particular situation; etc etc. It should also be remembered that for most individuals ethics is not an absolute: there are times when we bend the rules legitimately. Some things are, after all, more unethical than others: the unethical act ranges from being 'a bit cheeky' to being 'abhorrent', with a gulf in between. Artists, like other individuals, weigh up the responsibility of acting ethically with the costs, and make decisions accordingly. Art is perpetrated by individuals, and as such will always be subject to the vagaries of individual conscience and bias.

We have already suggested that 'ethics' are often perceived as hanging in an internalised tension of equilibrium, balanced by the notion of aesthetics. However, the idea of aesthetics as applied to art is also a fraught collection of terminologies that should not be used without consideration. In everyday contemporary discourse, the term 'aesthetics' is used to denote a particular visual quality, often that of the visually pleasing or beautiful. This has not always been the case however, and if we return to theorist Grant Kester we find a definition of what he terms the *dialogical aesthetic*, which seems to in some way harmonise a discussion of the ethical within fine art practice with the notion of aesthetic inquiry.

> *"This* [the dialogical aesthetic] *involves an investigation of the emergence of the aesthetic in early modern philosophy. In a range of Enlightenment-era writings, aesthetic experience is associated with a potentially utopian capacity for exchange and communication. This capacity is established, however, through a philosophical system that makes problematic claims for its transcendental authority. To resolve this impasse I draw upon the work of Jurgen Habermas, who has developed a model of human interaction that retains the emancipatory power of aesthetic dialogue without recourse to a*

universalizing philosophical framework... Dialogical practices require a transition from a model of art criticism based on the perception of physical objects to an evaluation based on what Habermas terms 'discourse ethics'."

This return to an enlightenment-era definition of aesthetics seems particularly significant as contemporary public art practices increasingly utilise the non-physical, non-visual tools of gesture and facilitation[9]. No longer representing the *avant-garde* of public practice, these non-object based works have become increasingly accepted by the mainstream and rightly lauded for their success in integrating the art intention with a broader ethical impact on the social sphere. Kester's dialogical aesthetic becomes an important way to discuss these practices and to frame them within a meaningful critical discourse. As a definition, however, the dialogical within aesthetic language must be seen alongside the visual in order to discuss a multiplicity of practices using a multiplicity of tools. The visual (as distinct from the beautiful) undeniably retains a place within discussion of the field of fine art so long as it is not the only aspect of a work that is discussed.

Seen in this light, the balance between the ethical and the aesthetic (both in dialogical and visual terms) is clearly more at tension in the practices of some artists that in others. We may even feel that the pressure of that tension ought to be intensified by the position of the work in that spectrum of public-ness, with the most publicly intentioned work having the greatest responsibility to ethical soundness along with the greatest responsibility for aesthetic resolution[10]. This feeling should perhaps lead us to the conclusion of this text, framing as it does the artist's sometimes opposing obligations within the context of the production of new work. Art, as a process of inquiry, can never consolidate these fundamental questions into a single comprehensive answer because to do so would render art practice obsolete. The development of new work and the continuation of the field of fine art practice rely on the continuing negation of what is assumed, an incitement that does not exclude the weighty questions of what is right and what is wrong. Art will always challenge, surprising itself as much as anybody else, until the previously unthinkable becomes the mainstream. The friction between ethics and aesthetics is therefore necessary. This complex and at times uneven relationship

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[9] a plethora of artists now use these methodologies, from Suzanne Lacy to *Sans façon*.

[10] Which artwork is the most public? That's a whole other question, but I think intended audience must come into it, and likewise aspects such as funding or commissioning: public funding may imply a public obligation, as may public commissioning for example. Any rules however, are always made to be broken.

raises complex and at times uncomfortable questions, which we must continue to pursue but never to assume.

***Aesthetics and Ethics* of Working in Public Art**
A summary of the discussion

Motives and hunches

The hunch behind *Working in Public* is that art now exists in the public sphere in unprecedented ways.

Working in Public aims therefore to open up greater uncertainty in what we think art is and to provoke more thoughtful and creative responses to what it might become. In understanding how and why artists currently work in public we may begin to understand the nature of the public sphere itself as it is in the process of being creatively and critically formed.

In developing the programme, we are not interested in creating a normative 'model' of public art practice. It seems more appropriate to attempt to arrive at a sense of quality through a conscious and active process of debating what quality means. Through Working in Public we are building a rigorous understanding what actually happens in practice; what tensions and contradictions arise when artists intervene in the public sphere; what if any, is the impact of the work on the imagination and on our capacity to think and act differently.

What new understanding from Suzanne Lacy's work resulted from this first seminar?

For me the seminar placed in sharp focus the way in which we construct the critical narrative of project experience. Britain supports the arts through the State more than private sources and increasingly in relation to social inclusion agendas. As artists and administrators we have tended to conflate reflective critical thinking with the kind of evaluation that we think a funding body needs to hear or that they request. Instead of giving ourselves permission to adopt a disinterested approach (in the sense that Eagleton uses *trying to feel (a) way imaginatively into the experience of others* (Eagleton, 2003)), we fall into the trap of 'feel good' stories that preferably impact on a large number of people. Is this the only form of discourse open to us in a publicly funded culture for the arts? Is there a way of developing narratives of experience that are critical as well as sensory? What do we need to understand as artists, theorists and administrators in relation to the experience of making art?

Suzanne Lacy offered a different way of approaching this discourse. There were two issues that I found particularly striking. The Oakland projects became a long term commitment to analysing and learning from the conditions of the project – the key actors, organisations, influential factors – social, economic, political and cultural as well as the opportunities for the art to have impact. This analysis was iterative, providing the energy for the participants and artists to grow the work in meaningful ways. This does not mean that all art interventions need to be long term. However, it does imply an in depth knowledge of the circumstances of an art project that takes into account duration, changes that happen over time. There is an art to this discourse.

Secondly and related to this issue, the artists (Suzanne Lacy and Chris Johnson) took a critical stance by mapping the synergies between what they had to offer as artists (an interest in media representation and media literacy respectively) and the circumstances

of Oakland (a literate, articulate youth culture that was negatively manipulated in the media). In other words the simplistic notion of 'doing good through art' is displaced here by a much more sophisticated critique of mutuality and relationship. This critique in turn generates a set of judged responses. In the case of Oaklands these responses include creating a level platform between youth and the adult world, reversing patterns of speaking and listening, embodying a process of learning about 'self' in relation to 'other' through a series of iterative feedback loops.

These two issues place knowledge and judgement differently in relation to contemporary art practice. Knowledge is outwardly focussed. It is not knowledge *of* art and the workings of its world but in depth knowledge of people and their circumstances of living - both individual and organisational. It is not judgement in relation to the expectations of the artworld, but in relation to the way of life, beliefs and expectations of particular social, cultural circumstances; the steering of these towards a different outcome.

I believe that these two issues do not appear within our discourse in Europe. David Harding (Common Work conference, Glasgow 21-22 April) discussed other attributes of successful public art. He argues that conceptual art fares better than material work because concepts live in the imagination alongside the real world. Participation in the development of an artwork creates a sense of shared ownership. Good public art lives on in the reality of everyday life. For example, 'Gratitude', the rose named by the artist Graham Fagen in the *Where the Heart is* project at Royston Road (2000), was planted in private gardens as well as public spaces in the communities of Royston Road in Glasgow. These attributes while taking on the discourse of the everyday do not make a commitment to critical judgement or shared learning to the depth that is manifest in Suzanne's work. They perhaps successfully bridge the artist's authoring of an idea – a concept, with a community.

The research that we have done to this point indicates that many artists are no longer seeking to represent the world (as with *Where the Heart is*, Royston Road) but rather to effect change within it. Suzanne Lacy is one of the pioneers of this different approach to art making. We felt in preparing the series that the changing relationship between the concepts of *aesthetics* and *ethics* marks this shift. In offering these concepts as a theme to frame the discussion, we discovered that for many these terms are also remote from day to day experience. They are more aligned to a particular philosophical discourse to which we are outsiders rather than interlocutors. *Aesthetics,* the dictionary tells us*,* includes the study of the mind and emotions in relation to beauty as well as the *principles of art. Aesthetics* articulate notions of the beautiful, the ugly, the comic and sublime as they are applied to fine art, the meaning and validity of critical judgement in relation to art. *Ethics* are the principles that guide social behaviour, the rightness or wrongness of both motive and action.

Through his seminal text *Conversation Pieces 2004* Grant Kester has provided us with a keystone for rethinking artists' work in the public sphere. This keystone is a notion of aesthetics in which dialogue and collaboration are symptomatic of approaches to art that actively seek critical connections or relations with society and its processes. Suzanne Lacy's work is one of a number of artists within this new paradigm. Others include Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison, Lorraine Leeson, Stephen Willats and the Artists Placement Group (Barbara Stevini and John Latham). His observations of these art practices indicate to him that the particular artists are no longer working from the values of modernism and the avant garde based on rupture and dislocation. Instead these

artists are seeking out more convivial, discursive approaches that through collaboration (rather than agonistic engagement) might lead to change.

I was particularly struck by the fact that within the seminar Grant did not labour 'the dialogic'. He is aware perhaps that like the discourse of the 'everyday', it has become 'fashionable' as well as contested in a way that polarises the discourse rather than furthering its development. He opened up new lines of thinking that takes his argument to a new more nuanced and current edge. Grant focused on examples of art practice that operate in the interstices of people/community and ecomonic realities of global culture (Superflex and Park Fiction). Both groups of artists are 'edgy' in relation to aesthetics (the one by an absence of conventional 'artistic' content, the other operating within an aesthetics of kitsch). They both attempt to adopt highly ethical positions in relation to contemporary culture and citizenship, but in ways that leave us puzzling. Their closeness to real life is described by Grant as art operating in a way that is 'adjacent' to the everyday, appearing and disappearing within the texture of encounter.

I discuss these in more detail later but wanted here to point to two key insights.

Grant presaged a discussion that is emerging as crucial to our discussion in *Working in Public* i.e. the relationship of economics to artistic practice and its existing formative/normative role. Perhaps more importantly, a critical reviewing of this relationship might present new opportunities for viewing economics as an aspect of creative endeavour rather than simply a pay master.

Grant also invited us to join him in the act of criticism not in the consumption of its product. He established an important principle for the whole programme. Many of us struggle not to be overwhelmed with the weight of theory that is emerging in art and its discourse. Grant encouraged us in gain the confidence to be critical and to think for ourselves. He led by example in ways that I explore later in this text.

Thinking for oneself from an informed position and thinking sensorily are the fundamental principles of *Working in Public* as an endeavour.

Framing the discussion

As indicated, the two key presenters in Seminar 1 were Suzanne Lacy and Grant Kester. Suzanne has worked for over thirty years as an artist in the social realm and Grant as an art historian and theorist who has focused on contemporary artists who choose to work directly within social, political and cultural processes.

Suzanne is developing an in depth analysis of a particular body of work of her own work - the *Oakland Projects* (1990-2000). She is interested in understanding the unique historiography of this work in the US, in particular its dominant influences in feminism, political activism and through individuals such as Allan Kaprow. She is also interested in connecting the work with the exponential development of public art and related thinking in Europe. The seminars aim to contribute to this aspect of her research.

Supporting the programme of work for its duration are 18 core participants who bring to the discussion their experience of working in public as artists and administrators from different organisational bases. They are mainly drawn from Scotland and also include

representation form Ireland, England and Finland. They were selected from open competition.

Art is illusive by nature. Grant suggests that we restlessly seek to define and redefine what it is. In recent history (19th -20th century) art turned in on itself within a dialectic in which avantgarde practices, such as Dada, set out to displace accepted canons of the academy. As these canons changed, they generated further oppositional responses that compete for ascendancy. The emergence of an internalised discourse, in which aesthetics is a dimension of art alone (rather than of human life and also of nature), is now being challenged. Artists are increasingly defining themselves in relation to the world in a convivial way, not as rupture (as was the case in Dada). Many choose to intervene directly in social and cultural spheres, rather than mediated through institutional practices of the museum and gallery. Each artistic paradigm, of rupture or of relationship, operates within a different framework for thinking about aesthetics and its relationship to ethics.

The exploration of these different paradigms in relation to artists' work became a leitmotif of the two days, revealing aspects of the Oakland projects through the subtly different emphases that Suzanne and Grant placed within the discussion.

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The Oakland projects
In introducing the notion of a case study in this first seminar Suzanne laid down some clear markers for understanding her work in Oakland 1990-2000. In this body of work she is unequivocally an artist who works in and with the world, in particular issues of tension and contradiction that arise in social life.
- Her work stems from her interest in activism. In particular she is concerned with how the images of individuals become manipulated in the public sphere e.g. through the media, often negatively to serve political purposes.
- The work is formed through a process of deep, ongoing analysis of the context. In the case of the Oakland projects this analysis was centred on the breakdown of the relationship between young people and the adult world, exacerbated by issues of race.
- Aspects of the work are highly authored and controlled for aesthetic/dramatic effect. The resulting process is also highly participatory.

Suzanne's motivation in becoming involved in Oakland was not to 'do good' in some generalised way. Oakland is a predominantly black community with a long history of activism. For Suzanne as artist the opportunity for new work precisely lay in Oakland's knowledge of itself. Oakland has a significant tradition in radical politics such as the Black Panther movement. Young people are articulate.

She researched over time the field of relationships, media practices as well as relevant academic and policy based literature, gathering other individuals into a thorough grasp of the issues in its particular context of Oakland youth of colour and their relationship to authority. The work was sustained through complex relationships with individuals who worked collaboratively alongside her and who gathered knowledge about the project context.

The discrete performances or tableaux, the most overtly artistic processes, were one aspect of a complex strategy. This strategy set out to create, or give form to,

opportunities for different players to engage critically with their experiences and to move forward in a different way.

This work, with time, effected changes in attitudes and behaviour between young people and the adult world. Her current research is a quest to find convincing ways of analysing the complex, multivalent nature of the work and of understanding the significance of art in this change.

Learning from an artist's practice

On the Edge has often defined its research approach through the words of John Dewey.

> "Activity that is not checked by observation of what follows from it may be temporarily enjoyed. But intellectually it leads nowhere. It does not provide knowledge about the situations in which action occurs nor does it lead to clarification and expansion of ideas."

> Dewey, J. (1938)

Our *checking by observation* in the case of Oakland we draw on Suzanne's own narrative alongside comprehensive video documentation of two of the four major Oakland performance pieces. We do not have the direct, visceral experience of being present at the performances or workshops. The danger of an analysis that is based on secondary documentation is that we 'cream-off' those aspects of the work that we can grasp intellectually. We separate form from meaning, emotion from intellect.

Suzanne's presence as narrator mitigates against the dangers to a degree. She herself asks in the course of her own inquiry - How does one describe this work?

Artists and others involved in the process based work increasingly learn through the narratives of artists who make the work and through the spectators, critics and theorists who experience the work. We have to accept this limitation. We have to pay attention to the narratives and how we construct them.

So what might have we observed in this process? The scale and reach of Oakland (ten years, hundreds of participants and networks) is extremely unusual in our context.

The programme grew out of a critique of circumstances. It grew in relation to understanding a series of synergies. Suzanne 's interest and long term involvement in the power of representation led her to recognise in the Afro American youth of Oakland, a contradiction and a challenge. The young people could voice clearly the issues that effected their lives, but they were not being heard. They were consistently portrayed in ways that were negative. Suzanne's colleague at California College of the Arts, Chris Johnson, taught media literacy. She worked with him to develop a new curriculum based on media literacy working with high school teachers and their pupils. They created films with their art students of the process. Chris Johnson notes with irony
> "I think of media literacy that it is like trying to teach a fish about wetness. It is everywhere and it shapes your whole way of being. When those images are negative, you feel abandoned and frustrated, when they tell you constantly that you are less idealistic, less motivated, less intelligent than the generations that went before you, you feel abandoned and frustrated".

Given the opportunity to observe and deconstruct their mediated environment, the young people engaged in critical discussions both with their peers and with adults such as teachers and youth leaders.

The processes and relationships were drawn together into the performances that mark a point in time in an extended and complex process over time. The performances enact conversations and reverse the dynamic of relationships.

In 'Roof is on Fire' Suzanne articulates the work as follows-
>"Everyone who comes is going to have to lean over and crane their necks, so in a way the audience is going to be as interesting as the performers. The audience will perform the act of listening and the teenagers will perform the act of self revelation".

>"Listening is a profoundly revolutionary act" (Chris Johnson).

Both Suzanne and Chris have grasped an opportunity to create change in circumstances that were capable of responding to that intervention.

The programme drove a conscious, carefully organised and highly collaborative process of discovering the deep texture of relations and issues that shape the visceral character of a place and its people. She reconfigured the norms of how one sector related to the other – adults to young people, the police and young people, young people to each other based on a critical analysis of the circumstances, nurtured by her interest in representation.

....
Grant Kester picked up the discussion by focused on one of Suzanne's three key questions –how does this work operate as art? How does it affect/effect? He did not directly address Oakland at this point. He threw into the mix two new case studies of art in the public sphere that further test a perceived threshold between art /nonart. The selected case studies went against the grain of funding systems or patronage of the arts. They also operated closely to the organisations and processes of the environments in which they occurred, appropriating normal everyday practices rather than overtly artistic strategies.

Grant's case studies included *Park Fiction*, Hamburg 1997 and two projects by the artist's group Superflex, the *Biogas* project 1998 in Africa and *Gauraná Power* 2004 in Brazil. He effectively laid out the complexity and ambiguity of aesthetics and ethics that these projects manifested, leaving us puzzling over their interrelationship.

Park Fiction 1997 was a self organised response to the power of civic planning and gentrification. The area is a red light district on the banks of the Elbe. The community group at the heart of the project were inhabitants of the area. They appropriated the practices of architectural charettes. These normally only involve the professional sector in the decisions making process. *Park Fiction* adopted this more as a convivial and democratic form of public consultation. As a result people in this part of Hamburg decided for themselves, as inhabitants, what they would most like to see in terms of development. A new park was constructed within an aesthetic of kitsch, of 'popular' culture that displaced the proposed development based on norms of rational modernism.

One of the principles at work in these projects, Kester cites, is adjacency. The processes that constitute the projects are intrinsic to social life as found. They are not overtly artistic. They are so 'lifelike' that at times he has to question how, if at all, they can be distinguished from normal everyday practices. Do we take it on faith that this is art?

Superflex' *Biogas* project in Africa appears to be functional in terms of developing a sustainable means of recycling agricultural waste into energy. It appears to be exactly like the work of an NGO. The difference that Superflex themselves lay claim to is economic, not artistic. The *Biogas* system and its apparatus is being sold to individuals who can afford it across Africa and parts of the Far East. Where NGOs are criticised for creating dependency, the *Biogas* project is intentionally developed as an economically viable venture.

Grant's reflection on the work of Superflex led me to their website. The organisation diffuses its activity as art extremely effectively and self consciously through art channels, and also by engaging (occasionally) in art like activities. For example, Grant tells us, last summer Superflex' artists appeared in Africa in khaki shorts and pith helmets - colonial attire that aimed to satirise, through 'performative' or 'theatrical' techniques, European colonialism within sites of post colonial devastation.

This project, like *Park Fiction*, contributes to rethinking the everyday at a political level. It shares this goal with activism and environmentalism. Both projects form new kinds of localised social networks. Their action aims to mediate and complicate the trajectory in global culture towards the management of growth and development from top to down.

What is perhaps challenging in both these projects is the absence of as overt visual aesthetic that would distinguish them as 'art'. There are tactics that are 'real' in the sense of being 'life like'. We do not know enough to judge if the work has impact i.e. is 'real' in terms of bringing about profound change in attitude. Perhaps that is not the goal. The overwhelming impression is improvisational, tactical rather than strategic, a kind of 'transformative ruse'. Like a joke, we suddenly see ourselves. What we see is touched by the absurd.

The ephemeral nature of the work in these two studies and its reliance on an intellectual grasp of the intention, made me think again about we might be seeking in the Oakland 'case study'.
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The Question of Aesthetics

Grant's articulation of the history of aesthetics presented us with a profoundly different and relevant framework for the discussion. Grant acknowledged as inevitable the struggle we were having with the terminology of aesthetics and ethics. As I understand his thesis, earlier (pre modernist) definitions of aesthetics from the greek *aesthetike* place emphasis on the sensory or haptic experience of the world within moments of shared experience. Aesthetics, in this original sense, marked a terrain of social interaction that was outside of religion or politics. It also stood outside of a functional knowing of the world. This earlier notion of aesthetics was rooted in bodily experience, connecting us to an underlying knowing -'being' rather than 'having'. This sensibility

opened up the possibility of an experience of community that was not externally imposed through power, but felt at an individual level.

It is important to acknowledge this history because it shows that aesthetics have been profoundly connected with the issue of ethics, and not limited to art.

Late 19th – 20th century art movements tend to invest aesthetic experience in 'objects' of art. This tendency coincided in Europe with the acquisition of artefacts from all over the world that had lost their connection and meaning to place and cultural practices. Modernism brought about an inversion – the idea that objects were 'freed' to exist purely in terms of their formal qualities. This later notion of aesthetics was transferred to authored artworks that became the embodiment of a moment in time in which aesthetic value is invested predominantly in the 'vehicle' or 'form' as a 'carrier' of the universal, detached from nature or specific culture.

Object centred notions of aesthetics harbour some problematic assumptions. Within practices of the avant garde we are accustomed to thinking that it is the artist who has autonomy, the freedom to enunciate, to shock as a means of breaking habitual ways of perceiving the world. Kester argues that thinking of the artist as in some way 'beyond ethics' is, in itself, an illusion of freedom. Within this illusion the artist inhabits a sequestered space in which his/her voice is rarely challenged. The 'object of art' gathers an unprecedented autonomy, divorced from the social and cultural context of shared experience, in which we actually make meaning. The consequence is to close off any debate on aesthetic and ethical tensions that are in fact ongoing and ever present.

Suzanne pointed out that in her experience the recovery of these older notions of aesthetics were attracting some antagonism, priviledging formalism over newer approaches. She invited Grant to speculate as to why this might be the case in a post modern world.

Grant responded by suggesting that modernist notions had been revived in post structuralism by individuals who come from a tradition of interpreting text. They therefore place emphasis on the artwork as a kind of text to be decoded. Effectively formalism had become recast as signification (i.e. no longer of representation) making it difficult for critical or theoretical practices to deal with non object based processes. If the work was not available as a text, fixed in some way, it could not be 'read'.

This discussion resonates with Suzanne's own question of 'How does one describe the work?". It also resonates with the principle of 'checking by observation' – How do we revisit experience with a view to learning from it?

Suzanne and Grant worked with this history of aesthetic/ethical thought placing different emphasis in their interpretation of the Oakland work.

Oakland projects as experience in time

Suzanne's work is in many aspects a counterpoint to 'text based practices'. She traced its lineage in the work of Allan Kaprow, in his notion of the blurring of art and life and his own realisation of this notion through performance. Suzanne's sense was that Kaprow's performances were precisely created to provoke questions about who got to be the artist and who had access to art. (They were also designed to interrupt everyday experience

that was dominated by contingent and instrumental behaviour introducing experience that was of a different order – for its own sake). This area of work was focused by open ended experimentation of what art might be. Artists like her (the Harrisons, David Antin, Martha Rosler) worked within an intuitive, experimental space.

Feminism, in particular, had enabled her to understand the power of relationships.

Suzanne's practice is in some senses both formal and avant garde. She traced the judgements that she had made in assembling the tableau pieces - *Roof is On Fire 1997, No Blood No Foul, Expectations, Code 33*. They were judgements of light, scale, spatial choreography, freedom of movement and social interaction and of timing. Within these tableaux little was left to chance other than the specific content of the conversations at the heart of the work. Suzanne was deeply concerned with holding the tension of the performance. She understood that breaking the tension was a loss of aesthetic experience for the participants. This happened in *Code 33* when the work was compromised by the interception of a demonstration by *Free Mumia* supporters who were protesting against a a recent Supreme Court denial of Mumia Abu Jamal's death row appeal. On being invited to participate and appropriate the platform of the work, they declined. Their goal was to piggy back on the available media, redirecting attention to their specific issue and away from the performance.

It is also striking that these artistic judgements had a different focus from conventional authored work. At the centre were the voices of young people and the individuals that they encountered, rather than the 'private symbolic world of the artist' (Bourriaud 1999). The work targeted the kinds of stereotypical roles that were played out habitually and uncritically in everyday life.

It is interesting to note that the formal aesthetic structure that constitutes this work perhaps also exposes its deepest contradictions in the very act of creating a moment of visibility. There is fear of appropriation – that the artist is using people in the creation of the work that ultimately places the artist, and not the participants, in a position of power. This becomes particularly sensitive post performance, where the work is represented back into the artworld. A dimension of appropriation is the danger or indignity of speaking for others or imposing on others one's own value systems as apparently happened in the work of Dawn Dedeaux' *Soul Shadows* 1993, an installation work that attempted to expose the lives of young black people in the prison system.

It is worth pausing here to revisit a series of observations that Grant made about the visual. He reflected on our deep seated anxiety in relation to the purely visual or retinal, a fear of images that would lead us astray. On the one hand by keeping the visual within the domain of images, it distinguishes itself. Dedeaux' installation appears to rely on an intense presence of monitors, security cameras, life sized photographs, videos of an impressive, architectural scale. The visual avoids becoming assimilated by another focus. In the case of *Soul Shadows* this was to the project's cost. What was cut out appeared to be the possibility of a deeper, more sensory and complex set of debates that are social, cultural and historical.

There is the criticism of inappropriate spectacle or display – the danger of exploiting the misery of other people's lives by framing through aesthetic, visual, 'seductive' means. This is perhaps particularly problematic when the artist is culturally not of the host society, a white woman working in a community of colour.

There is the criticism of naivety in terms of attempting to solve large and deep rooted social problems as a non expert.

Grant interestingly described Suzanne's performance works as the tip of the iceberg of a mass of relationships. They were essential to the work but of a different order to the meetings and conversations that had led up to them. It was important to take the work as a whole as this addresses the full meaning of aesthetics as a complex ethical, political and cultural discourse. It was helpful for us to understand that in parts of the US, policing as a social practice has gained power in the past 30-40 years. The police are the primary point of contact of individuals with authority. This fact is crucial to understanding attitude to race and class. Suzanne's work created space – a different way of existing in the social, political field of Oakland, produced by individuals that had an opportunity to reconfigure historically constituted values. Participants in the work, police and youth sat down together. Through the careful drawing in of the media the image of policing was also altered.

Suzanne's way of thinking about ethics within the Oakland projects was to place emphasis on critical reflection and analysis of the work, post production. She articulated a number of 'sites of analysis'. They are framed by questions - What has changed? To what extent did individuals transcend their differences? Maybe part of the pressure to rethink analysis was that initially they had been too optimistic and had assumed too much in terms of impact, mostly relying upon anecdotal evidence. So developing a process that would allow her to handle the character of the work in a complex way, to deconstruct the level of impact has become extremely important.

Suzanne's sites include
- **understanding political context /circumstances** –e.g. of race, gender, compassion. Grant defined this as a political analysis that has ethical implications.
- **process by which individuals related to the group across boundaries of difference.** Process therefore includes collaboration, decentring authority, relationship
Grant observed that the Oakland projects do not dissolve differences magically but they do suggest that common ground is possible, so the focus of process is on negotiation.
- **personal actions**, intentions and commitments
- **public actions** and commitments – representations e.g. through the media, in galleries, responses (Did something happen directly?) and results (What changed?)

Conclusions

I have explored earlier what I could take away with us from these two sessions in Seminar 1.

Grant's framework of the history of aesthetics and its changing relationship with ethics proved invaluable to centring the discussion. He provided us with a set of ideas that opened the discourse, that could not be applied like a blanket but that made us think.

Suzanne's sites of analysis drawn up as the artist at the core of this work acknowledge the importance of the voice of the artist in critical reflection. They acknowledge the inappropriateness of applying a set of criteria from one cultural circumstance to another while striving for a sharp, nuanced unfolding of the complexity of this work over time.

 Both have implications for where the energy of knowledge is placed.

The Oaklands projects and analysis indicate that it is not the artist who creates change. He/She creates the circumstances for change to be a possibility. A significant aspect of these circumstances of that is having the space to explore contradictions inherent in the experience of the particular within everyday, effectively to challenge the forces of power and representation in art as part of society. This leads us to our second seminar.

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Reflections on Working in Public Art, Practice and Policy
Reiko Goto

In this seminar we focused on aesthetics and ethics, policy and practice implications of new approaches to art operating in the public realm. I wanted to see some examples of work by artists, educators, and arts administrators in mainly Scotland, the UK, US, Northern Ireland and Australia. I was interested in what kind of issues the core participants would bring to the discussion, and how they would talk about ethics and aesthetics in relation to their work and Suzanne Lacy's Oakland projects. I was also interested in how ecological and environmental art could be included in this subject of working in public art, practice and policy. In the afternoon, the discussion session consisted of the eighteen core participants divided into three groups. The groups talked intensively for two hours and then gathered together to present the summaries of their discussions.

Three important features of the summaries were apparent. Firstly, dialogue was clearly an important approach in the artists' practice. Secondly, the constraints placed on artists by institutional bureaucracy were highlighted, such as the scale and duration of projects, funding sources, and the evaluation criteria, which was also influenced by funding. Finally, I understood that the core participants recognized that aesthetics and ethics were intertwined in socially and politically engaged art practice, but I could not articulate how they were recognised the differences in their individual work.

During the discussion session, involving three core groups, I was a facilitator for one of which Keith Donnelly and Kate Foster gave presentations. Damian Killeen, Janice Parker, Jean Cameron, and Sussi Porsborg Conlin and I were deeply engaged with the presentations, and Sarah Males recorded our discussion. For this paper I only quoted Keith and Kate, even though the core's conversation and the final reports from other groups were extremely helpful and assisted me in my interpretation of the material.

Keith Donnelley, who has twenty five years' experience as an Arts Development Officer with Visual Arts at South Lanarkshire Council, stated he was influenced by David Harding, who was a pioneer of social art practice in Glasgow. Keith emphasized the importance of dialogue as an approach by introducing a book called EK Modernism, the result of a public art project he had organized in 2005. One of the contributors, Sylvia Grace Borda, a researcher at the University of British Columbia, was invited to East Kilbride for ten months. She focused on New Town modernist buildings that were going to be demolished. According to Keith, the buildings were designed as a model of utopian planning in the 60s. During the residency program, Sylvia spent time talking to the city planners and residents to help understand this development, and created a photographic documentation of the buildings.

I am curious how the dialogue influenced Sylvia to choose certain places, buildings, time, and light qualities to create a set of documentation for East Kilbride. The photographs of EK Modernism somehow look very familiar, even though I have never been to East Kilbride, because they are of ordinary things which exist in our daily lives, such as families, houses, gardens, furniture, roads, parks, schools, and buildings. The importance of ordinary things is often overlooked, and changes are very gradual. Sylvia listened to people and appeared to be tracing their memories through her camera.

Artists can make people pay attention to the way they look at things. Suzanne Lacy, the principle speaker, worked with ordinary young people in Oakland California between 1990 and 2000. We looked at the video documentary "Roof is on Fire", one of Suzanne's "Oakland projects". In the 90s there was a significant world-wide rise in youth culture, predominantly influenced by African American youth. This came with a mythology of fear, a perception of crime associated with youth culture and activist adults. In the public schools, 95 per cent of the population were black. The young people Suzanne worked with during the project were ordinary young people, but at the same time they were different. In this case the word "different" does not mean special or unique, simply that they were not treated or accepted equally as others. The project "Roof is on Fire" was sponsored by California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland Unified School District, Kron TV "Kids First" and other sources of donations. Suzanne was the Dean of the College at the time and collaborated with her colleague Chris Johnson. They developed a series of workshops on media literacy that would enable the young people to deconstruct the way in which their image was being manipulated. The project consisted of meetings, classroom activities, a large scale performance, and documentation. Two hundred high

school students, teachers and professionals were involved in the project. Suzanne and Chris took the role of creative artists during the production.

The performance site was a parking lot eight floors up with a view over downtown Oakland. The show started the moment the lift rose from the tough streets of Oakland and arrived at the roof top. There the audience saw many cars randomly placed. Each car was prepared for a group discussion on topics of sex, violence, and the future. Pam Moore, a CBS narrator, explained during the video, "You have seen these teenagers many times on TV, but rarely heard them speak. Tonight they have something to say. Tonight it's your turn to shut up and just listen."

On the video, Leuckessia Spencer, one of the senior high school students who worked on the project for six months, said, "Teenagers don't have a voice in this society. When they have a voice, it's dictated by someone else, but it's not the teenager's." Almost half of the video consisted of the voice of teenagers. Leuckessia was concerned after the performance that the audience might be bewildered. She said, "Your reality is like a blanket that keeps you warm, or keeps your mind in a certain set. Once you take the blanket off, the cold air will hurt you. If you don't remove the blanket, you will remain in your reality, which is not a real reality. You live in a fantasy life." Leuckessia's quote is similar to the way Suzanne described the performance: "After people experience "Roof is on Fire", they no longer look at young people the same way as they looked at them before."

I began to notice Suzanne's way of observing people was multi-layered. First, she recognized the media misrepresentation of youth in the area. Second, she set up a series of events to observe young people's dialogue. Third, she choreographed a performance that gave an opportunity to listen to others who usually didn't have a voice in society. Suzanne's aesthetics in the video documentary was delineated by both the young people and the audience. Finally, she presented the voice of young people through the media.

Artists practice how to observe critically and demonstrate their discovery to the audience. Robert Ryman, an American minimal art artist, painted a series of white paintings in the 60s. When the audience entered the room of a museum, they were bewildered to find only white paintings. People did not understand what they were supposed to be seeing. If they relaxed and stayed for a while, they might notice each white painting was slightly different: they might find different shades or intensity of the whiteness, almost like experiencing Zen meditation. It may be that Minimal art can lead people to become more sensitive to the environment. If observation is an important element of art practice, and I would say dialogue is a type of observation for socially and politically engaged practice, what will be the next step? When I discover something, I am excited. This excitement gives me a passion to tell something to others, and I would be cautious about the context where I am working on to create a path which leads other people to have the similar experience I had before. The path could be an installation, performance, tour and some other convivial events.

Grant Kester, the keynote speaker, in his book Conversation Pieces (p.106), described Jay Koh, a Singapore-born, Cologne based artist, "The act of establishing networks among Asian artists, writers, and activists across national boundaries is an integral part of his artistic practice, constituting a kind of aesthetics of listening." Listening to diverse voices and creating dialogue seem to be the keys to this artist's approach.

Aesthetics of listening must be including people who are quiet, things are dead or do not speak the human language. Of her project, Kate Foster states, "My interest is in the entwined relationships between animal and human lives in an age of species loss." She works with scientists and experts at the Department of Geographical and Earth Sciences and the Hunterian Zoological Museum at Glasgow University.

I understand that science museums carry out specific museum practices, such as collecting, studying specimens, organizing them, preserving them, and disseminating information. Museums choose the best specimens for the display. Even though different types of elaborate dioramas are created, the basic job of museums is to show the specimens.

Kate creates different ways of relating to the specimens. In a series of works she entitled "Bio Geo Graphies", Kate made physical connections between the dead creatures and their habitats, for example, hen harriers and North West Sutherland, Cross-bills and the pine forests of Scotland, and the Scotch Argus butterfly and an area between the Clyde

and Arisaig on the West Coast of Scotland. Her most recent project is about the Blue Antelope that became extinct in South Africa. Kate describes the skull of a blue antelope in the University collection: "The extremely scarce remnants of this animal are in Northern European museums, brought from the Cape of South Africa by colonial trade and pioneers of Western science." The only information about the Blue Antelope exists in the UK. Kate works with scientists and museum experts to create a "portable museum" showcasing the skull as well as information and stories about the blue-grey-coated animals. The portable museum will go to South Africa in the fall of 2007, and Kate hopes to find more stories there.

For her presentation, Kate brought a piece of fabric that had army woodland field patterns on which some letters were appliquéd. It took a few moments to recognize the letters, 'I CAN THINK WHAT I LIKE'. For the final report, the group decided to present this piece as a diagram that described the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and art. It might not be easily recognized, but when people experience it, just like touching the surface of the fabric and talking to Kate, aesthetics is there. Kate seems to be seeking the way to combine awareness of pressing environmental issues and social justice. I am also interested in environmental issues and art practice in the public realm. Before unpacking these, I would like to talk about what Grant Kester talked about aesthetics.

Grant asked, "What is aesthetics? Is it visual? Or is it form?" Kester said, "Aesthetics is the creation of experience, and it unites people." Kester also reminded us what Kandinsky said: "Art is a universal language." But Kandinsky's work cannot be just simply looked at and appreciated. Some background knowledge helps to understand the work of Kandinsky better, for example, in the way he observed and defined the movement of dancers and translated the form to dots, lines, space, and primary colours. It puzzled me again how art could unite people without any knowledge. On the other hand, Kandinsky's name was embedded in the history of Bauhaus, which was considered good design for everybody and everyday life. Bauhaus was introduced to art and architectural schools all over the world. Bauhaus created design criteria: functionality, rationality and simplicity. I believe the New Town buildings in East Kilbride were also influenced by these criteria. The Bauhaus movement gave birth to the idea of mass-production. In the 1900's, at the beginning of the modern period, Kandinsky seemed unable to predict to what kind of future modernism would lead us.

From what I understand, at the time, the system of values and ethics were very different from now. For example, in the US, nature was simply treated as a resource for people. In a place like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where I used to live, at the end of the 1800s the land was developed for large industries, and waste was dumped into the rivers and valleys. Not many people thought about each natural element such as soil, streams, wild flowers, where every aspect of nature had an intrinsic value, and the value was intricately connected to other living things, including people. Many species such as the spotted owl, frogs and native plants started disappearing. William Jordan, one of the founders of the magazine "Ecological Restoration" in the early 80s, wrote a book called Sunflower Forest. It was about a new land ethics that was based on a change of attitude towards damaged land and the ecosystem. Prairie restoration was demonstrated in many places in the U.S. and new woodland and grassland schemes were created, like the millennium urban forest project in the U.K.

The new environmental awareness was not only recognized by ecologists, environmental activists and philosophers, but also by artists who were looking at the same issues in different places. Alan Sonfist, an environmental artist, created a native plant wilderness area called "Time landscape" in the middle of New York City in 1965. Joseph Beuys, an artist and a co-founder of the Green Party in Germany, started planting 7000 oak trees in Kassel, Germany in 1982. Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison created a meadow called "Future Garden Part 1: The Endangered Meadows of Europe " on the rooftop at Rheinauen Park in Bonn in 1996.

It appears then that experts in different fields are looking at the same issues concerning land, ecology and a new way of relating to the environment. Sometimes they learn from each other, but what they offer to the public realm is more diverse and discursive aspects of the subject. Aesthetics should be clearly embedded in the socially, politically and environmentally engaged art, because it was discovered by each artist who went through a critical process which involved dialog and listening to others.

"What kind of dialogue is going on with the non-art models? What is the connection between the way people relate to one another, to their natural and artificial environments, and their cultural artifacts?”
-- *Essay on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Allan Kaprow, edited by Jeff Kelly, 1996