

AESTHETIC QUALITIES:

ENACTING UNDERSTANDING IN CONTEMPORARY ART ENDEAVORS

by

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(Under the Direction of Tracie Costantino)

ABSTRACT

Informed by a hermeneutic propensity, this arts-based autoethnography inquires into forms of social and participatory experience in contemporary art. A living art that uses people as the medium, this art operates in a cultural context stretching possibilities of objects, spaces, relations, discourses, and experiences in contemporary art. Often contested in contemporary discourse, I am interested in the ways in which these participatory art manifestations may be educative.

Reaching a critical juncture through participatory art experience, I begin reexamining art, aesthetics, and the conditions for making meaning with art. Throughout this narrative inquiry, reflexively and hermeneutically begin to develop an emergently fluid range of aesthetic qualities for art conceived through a political aesthetic. I then mindfully attend to participatory practices by experiencing myriad artistic endeavors in London, New York City, the fifty-fifth Venice Biennale, and beyond.

Engendering questions and confronting assumptions, while openly giving voice to my experiences verbally, poetically, and visually, I cautiously problematize the ways in

which participatory practices in contemporary art relate to our living. I open and invoke a pedagogical exploration of the educative implications for these practices in art education and aesthetic education. In doing so, I revisit questions pertaining to participation, conditions for understanding, political aesthetics, aesthetic qualities, and education. The capacious possibilities of this inquiry become an invitation for us to critically negotiate potential significance of these contemporary art practices, as well as aesthetic qualities in our lives.

INDEX WORDS: Contemporary art, Aesthetics, Arts-based, Autoethnography, Hermeneutics, Experience, Politics, Participatory art

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DEDICATION

For

Nancy & Mike

Who had the best art supplies and an abundance of talent to inspire me in using them.

Thanks for letting me color outside of the lines.

And occasionally on the walls.

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This work has taken a shape of which I am proud, yet it was not accomplished solitarily. I would be remiss not to give thanks for the multitudinous ways in which I have been fortunate throughout this endeavor. With a heart full of gratitude I appreciate the ways in which my family steadfastly nurtured my artistic proclivities, affectionately instilled in me a passion for living well, and encouraged aspirations for greatness. I remain deeply indebted to my adoring, supportive spouse. I thank you for not only patiently continuing to abide the slowness of my work, but for passionately exemplifying and inspiring me to live robustly.

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PREFACE

Exhaust the little moment.
Soon it dies.

And be it gash or gold
it will not come

Again in this identical
disguise.

—Gwendolyn Brooks

This is an inquiry to better explain how I endeavored to find more informed understanding of contemporary art of participatory experience. It started as an interest in better understanding what appeared to be interactive, participatory art relations. It stemmed not necessarily from an interest in wanting to participate in or with them, but in wanting to better understand how contemporary art participatory practices could inform

understanding. The irony here was that in order to understand, participation was not negotiable, I had to get involved if I wanted insight.

For an introvert growing into her skin later in life as I feel I have, this presented me with innumerable challenges. Rarely eager to proactively participate in a group context, this inquiry propelled me into positions of collaboration, as well as dissention. I placed myself in dissonant artistic manifestations in the name of a hermeneutic undertaking. In doing so, I worked to function in the ruins of uncomfortable, uncertain knowledge while working to form new understanding.

I endeavored this to hopefully advance the dialogue in art education and aesthetic education as it pertains to the ways in which we can learn through contemporary art manifestations and art as a form of living experience. I am energized by the abundance of possibility here as my *raison d'être* lies somewhere in the pensiveness of a political aesthetic.

CHAPTER ONE:
INCIPIENT RELATIONSHIPS



IMAGE 1.1: *What do you think*, 2012, photographic journal

You just had to be there, you wouldn't understand... I found myself saying this after a unique contemporary aesthetic experience. An efficacious endeavor, it was in this novel occurrence where I came face to face with art that simultaneously impassioned, yet unsettled me. Divisive while dwelling in possibility, it was art as a form of experiential social and participatory engagement.

The Social and Participatory

Part of a growing dialogue in contemporary art's ever-expanding scholarship and practice, social and aesthetic relations are part of a *social turn* (e.g., Jackson, 2011), or as Bishop (2012a) suggested, a social return since these efforts are part of a historic, continued dialogue to jointly rethink art. The scope of this inquiry explores and questions social artistic manifestations, art practices that involve people as the medium of a work, or art where participants constitute material relations. Following Bishop (2012a) I will refer to these works henceforth as *participatory art*. This is an endeavor to better understand contemporary art forms of participatory engagement.

Defying easy categorization, contemporary social practices bring art experience closer to everyday life. Vastly disparate in practice and aim, such artistic manifestations are designed to offer relevant contexts and stimulating dialogues that pertain to matters and issues of our contemporaneous lived world. Motivated by unyielding political questions, these social forms of art demand a reformulation of orthodox relationships in art. Roles of the artwork, the artist, and the audience are repositioned into more collaborative and fluid associations. In this regard, works of social and participatory art are reconceived as continuous projects with ambiguous beginnings and ends, artists become collaborators and co-producers of situations, and the audience becomes a politicized group of co-producers or participants (Bishop, 2012a).

Shifting our understanding from art as a static object and toward one social orientation, art moves from an artistic product to a process. It is an activation of participants where quite often an aim of such experience aspires to educe social change

for the participants involved. In short, art of social and participatory practice “can loosely be described as art that involves more people than objects, whose horizon is social and political change” (Lind, 2012, p. 49).

Understanding social and participatory corollaries of contemporary art practice connotes a consideration of participation. Participation includes the action of having or forming part of something, a way of partaking in or sharing in something (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). For me, participation in social art endeavors goes beyond activity, interactivity, or conviviality. As a form of involvement, participation also carries political implications.

I believe participation is politically imbued as it operates by affording opportunities of change and choice. Politics suggests ways in which society is capable of collectively, yet disharmoniously operating among others, while closely questioning human nature on many levels. For example, a politicized version of participation provides openings, ways beyond, and options for alterity from imposed dogma or normative limitations that prevail. It is a way of challenging and questioning conditions of power and status in our world, opening opportunities for new values or visions.

To be political is not to enact democratic philosophies but to provide opportunities upon which democracy may be enacted. Art should not produce a false sense of democratic hope just as it shouldn't confirm what we know. Rather, in being political, art should provoke and stimulate (Rancière, 2010). I believe, therefore, that deliberated enacted, such engagements should trouble us and they should make us somewhat

uncomfortable. Such provocations are to be desired as they are ways in which we can explore that which we do not know and that which we have yet to explore.

It is within such forms of politics where I perceive social and participative relations in art taking power. Inviting us into the realm of experience, participatory art practices are a way of viewing the aesthetic politically (Rancière, 2000/2004, 2004/2009a). Using participation as a point of departure, socially engaged practices in art are concerned with matters of politics, with matters of choice and consequence.

Human being participate and perform politically in varied ways; they choose when and how to engage in experiences. Just as one can choose to make a concerted or deliberate, if not efficacious, effort to partake in something, on the other hand, one could also choose not to participate. The negation of activity, as in the sense of nonparticipation, is a form of participation. Not participating is a choice to decline involvement and is also a form of partaking. Even though contemporary artistic practices are affording us with participatory experiences, we still must discern whether to engage in or with them.

By no means an exhaustive account of social and participatory practices in contemporary art, this is a mere start. I feel such matters deserve scrutiny since I believe social and participatory relations are one trajectory, among other competing discourses and practices, in which contemporary art is directionally headed. I do not desire a declarative position for this inquiry but rather an interrogative one. There are multiple points of contention and unknown variables to be examined just as there are unknown terminologies yet to arise.

This is an endeavor to better understand the ways in which contemporary art of participatory engagement may foster new understandings. Additionally, another aim of this inquiry is to narratively explore how analysis of such participatory experiences may inform art education and aesthetic education. In this arts-based inquiry, I used autoethnographic practices to render more clearly the meaning of lived experience as it pertains to participation in contemporary art endeavors. Relying on descriptive personal stories and first hand accounts, this inquiry desires to lend felt, lived insight into the essence of my experiences with participatory art.

Traveling far and wide to experience art with a temporal nature, throughout this narrative inquiry I worked nonlinearly (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). I scrupulously experienced art, read, wrote, questioned, explored, discussed, analyzed, reflected, and created art while systematically looking for relationships to connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole (Maxwell, 2013). Using narrative analysis, I then conclude by cautiously revisiting and further problematizing questions pertaining to the ways in which contemporary art relates to paradigmatic shifts in art's ontology, definitions of participation, conditions for understanding art, as well as ways in which participatory art endeavors may inform art education and aesthetic education potentials.

Participatory Possibilities

I have an overwhelming curiosity for many things. Art, when it challenges me, is no exception. Compelled by a sustained interest in contemporary art (e.g., Hughes, 2009), it isn't always easy to digest, however. I gravitate toward art that contests me; art that gives

me the metaphorical middle finger. I admire art that asks difficult questions, that diverts my attention as I feel such engagements most often compellingly lend educative benefit.

Aware that art is often designed to provoke, to push boundaries, to enliven us, I found this to be particularly the case when introduced to art as experience within a performative, participatory dimension. My introduction to these social and participatory practices came by way of reading about and discussing them in graduate school. Unlike any other I'd categorized as art previously, I was quite perplexed. More than any other struggle I'd endeavored with art before, I faced supreme uncertainty in understanding participatory art; these were unknowns unlike any I had navigated before.

Interested in these incipient, yet contested art engagements, it seemed that these live art endeavors were fundamentally working to animate art's ontology. Quite frankly, I was unsure how experience could constitute as art. More accustomed to art as an object, I was skeptical as to the ways in which artists were successfully fusing art as life or life as art through social and participative modalities. Temporary and experiential, human participation made the art possible; participation in the art experience was the means by which art was brought into living. Such conceptualizations were initially tough for me to comprehend from a practical application.

From a real-world standpoint, how is an experience art? In other words, how was it possible art could be conceived as (or at least what appeared to be) a simple conversation, an ordinary life moment, or a routine experience? How was participation considered art? Without an object to market and see, in what ways were artists surviving

apart from the commercial art market? How were institutions, such as schools or museums, preparing for the implementation of these notions?

Even naming issues were a concern for me. Simply put, I didn't know what to call these artistic practices for quite some time. Occasionally lumped under the umbrella of social practice, relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1998/2002), or participatory art (Bishop, 2012a), this wasn't always the case. For several weeks and months I was challenged by inconsistencies of nomenclature and I couldn't help feel that such challenges likely affected the accessibility of this art for others as well. If I, an artist, art educator, and life long art pedagogue, struggled in understanding how to go about describing or identifying these manifestations, surely others would face similar difficulties as well, especially those not educated in the arts.

Also problematic for me was the idea that these contemporary art practices of participation aimed to transform society through the socializing aspects of knowledge. While I comprehend that as historically situated beings we are built from one another (Gadamer, 1960/2004), I certainly didn't think we could be transformed by experiencing art collectively. Such an absurd notion seemed impracticable. Was I supposed to buy into the notion that by simply providing a context for people to gather and talk about art they would be altered?

I'd read about artist Rirkrit Tiravanija's performative event where he served curry as a communal activity, and artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, who opened an urban market to provide new economic opportunity and revitalization of derelict community locales. I felt such practices were closer to interventionist work or social justice, not necessarily art. I

struggled to understand how providing a context for experiential engagement and activity could constitute as art. Far too simplistic and cozy, what would prevent members of society from all becoming participatory artists? Were we all existing in a giant participatory art endeavor? Like Jackson (2011), I wondered, “how do we know when we are in the presence of ‘social practice’ in art” (p. 11)? What are the characteristics for entering into these spaces?

Living in situ, experiences are successive and regular. Following Dewey (1934/2005), I was aware that aesthetic experiences are more salient and conspicuous forms of experience. Aesthetic experiences may be transformational in some way as they stand above ordinary experiences. I was familiar with the emblematic claims that social practices were transformative; however, I wasn’t ready to agree that these participatory forms were aesthetic in implementation.

I wondered why the art community was gullibly buying into the notion that these experiences were constitutive of some special, transformative power. It seemed like an ambiguous, utopian way of viewing art, but then again, I couldn’t very well articulate other examples of transformative art as lived experience. I felt that there had to be more to understanding these contemporary art practices, so I began to consider that perhaps my initial readings of these art manifestations were surface interpretations. Was it possible there was some sort of a disconnect in my interpretation of this art? Since I had no first hand experience with these participatory art engagements, would lived experience lend better insight?

Intrigued by these notions, I was scuttling between the incalculable possibilities. I had mounting, unresolved concerns and questions. While turning over with possibilities in my head, this art had me on the cusp of critical chaos. It seemed that oceans of discontent tossed me amid waves of disquietude, that I couldn't find a resting place for my frustrations. Mystified by the sheer complexity of it all, I couldn't wrap my tiny brain around how art could operate through such disparate manifestations with such incongruent aims. It was a giant mess.

Admiring, valuing, and appreciating art immensely, I was highly suspicious that most of these participatory aims were achievable through these contemporary artistic practices. At times, I would have perhaps called the aims of a social art form preposterous. While I certainly felt the ameliorative ambitions should be applauded, I still, however, remained incredulous. I perceived them as highly esoteric and conceptually entropic, if not the apotheosis of elitism. Questions grew but plausibility for any form of understanding was nowhere in sight.

More challenged by this art than any before, I was frustrated yet not dejected. I wanted to wrestle with what social and participatory art could offer; yet for the time being, I chose to rest in unknowingness. I chose to give pause to these confounding notions since understanding them was not going to be a simple task. Coming to terms with an irrefutably political aesthetic was going to take time and I felt I needed to allow these ideas and questions to gestate a bit further.



IMAGE1.2: *All mixed up*, 2012, mixed media

Intensified Instabilities

Working to allow myself to be unencumbered by that which I did not understand was highly challenging. For a short time, I largely tried to dismiss these social and participatory manifestations. Believing that these contemporary practices were nearly unintelligible, I actually thought they would soon disappear into art oblivion. Yet, like ants at a picnic, they seemingly grew in abundance—at least for me. Conceivably becoming more apparent now that I was exposed to them, this art was ostensibly closing in on me. Social and participatory art relations wouldn't fade away; they kept coming back to me.

Appearing as though they were somewhat becoming more accepted into what I perceived as the seemingly impenetrable art canon, I found related discourses about contemporary, participatory art in various art publications (e.g., *Frieze* and *Art Forum*), online and social media outlets (e.g., hyperallergic and e-flux), museums (e.g., Tate Modern and Queens Museum of Art), art fairs and exhibitions (e.g., Performa and Frieze Art Fair), graduate programs (e.g., Portland State University's Social Practice MFA and Carnegie Mellon University's Contextual Practice MFA), and awards for artists (e.g., International Prize for Participatory Art and Leonore Annenberg Prize for Art and Social Change). Even in my own classroom as a high school teacher, I faced student questions about participatory and social art engagements. It seemed I couldn't escape this political form of art participation.

This influx of information helped sensitize me to the growing awareness of participatory arts practices. Far greater than I first imagined, participatory art practices have and continue to emerge from the fringes of orthodoxy; they are becoming more relevant and more present in our lives (The James Irvine Foundation, 2011). It seems that, as a society, many of us want to be a part of a participatory culture, that we are motivated by experiential, social, and participatory engagements (Dobrzynski, 2013). A report conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (2011a) recognized these societal shifts toward a participatory culture in the arts. This report suggested that:

The future of the arts may not lie in the restoration of higher levels of 'benchmark' attendance at traditional performances and exhibitions, desirable as those ends may be. Rather, it could lie in new kinds of arts

experiences and participation that are more active, that blur the line between performer and audience, that make the beholder a part of the creative process and artists the animators of community life-experiences which, for some people, hold more personal value than sitting in an audience. (p. 52-53)

In acknowledging and better understanding these shifting, yet incipient experiential and participatory desires, the NEA has begun altering the ways in which it conducts arts research to include more participatory forms of engagement (NEA, 2011b). This connotes recognition that we seek experience directly, not from a disinterested distance. We desire lived art experience that has relevancy and meaning for our lives; we desire more active participation in art. As a result, we are witnessing an “arts ecosystem” (NEA, 2011a, p. 53) restructuring and transforming to adapt to these needs. Such restructuring includes more social and participatory art engagements; it includes bringing art closer to life.

Awakening me to the vibrancy of our fluctuating contemporary moment as it pertains to experience and participation, I began to rethink participatory art endeavors. Softening to the notion that contemporary changes in artistic forms of practice may be ways of reconnecting to our lives, I was still deeply hesitant that art, no matter the manifestation, could move me enough to passionately change me. I’d experienced positive, memorable engagements with art before, but never any that ultimately changed my thinking or living. More open to these ideas, yet with disquietude close to heart, I proceeded with caution in looking for experiences that could lend insight into novel participatory art endeavors.

Methodologically Moving

Exploring the ways in which aesthetic and social relations are imbricated through participatory art practices is best lent to qualitative inquiry. Since we all actively take part in making our world and we make sense of it through our lived experiences (van Manen, 1990), I lend mine for this inquiry. Valuing experience as a primary form of inquiry, this active and interpretive process aims to evocatively express my experiences with participatory art, not just tell about them (Denzin, 2003). Moreover, this inquiry explores how analysis of such participatory experiences may inform art education and aesthetic education.

As I have expressed, I faced several points of contention with participatory art. It seems my contention ceases to dissipate as questions pertaining to this novel art continually shift as society demands. Hermeneutically sentient, I accept such questioning as I feel it is best to explore questions than demand answers. Fortunate to be working within a postmodernist, poststructuralist climate, I feel questioning is welcome as it enables me to creatively and actively explore windows of opportunities that may lend insight for ways beyond currently conceivable. Although numerous questions were raised, for this particular inquiry I was specifically attending to questions that asked:

1. In what ways might engaging in contemporary artistic forms of participatory practice foster new understandings?
2. How might analysis of my experiences with contemporary artistic forms of participatory practice inform art education and aesthetic education?

Searching for robust insight and understanding into the many tenuous aspects of participatory art, such perspicacity is not imparted linearly or simply. Acts of understanding often creatively unfold like aesthetic experience (Schwandt, 2004), and here I aimed to perform understanding through an inquiry of craft (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Evoking great care, this inquiry is crafted artfully and perspicaciously. Working through multiple forms of interconnected processes (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), like a bricoleur (Lévi-Strauss, 1966) this inquiry weaves across many lines of influence and blurred genres (Geertz, 1993) in search of understanding.

Motivated to examine that which is close up in our lives, this is an exploration of a localized and personal way of knowing (Barone & Eisner, 2012). I felt narrative inquiry (Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Ellis, 2004) was the most appropriate means of investigating this topic. In this arts-based inquiry, I invoked autoethnographic practices to explore the ways in which participatory, contemporary forms of art may offer new insight. Influenced by artful, narrative accounts of experience (e.g., Ellis, 2004; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Slattery, 2001; Suominen, 2006), this inquiry implores the use of creative license to delve into the contested nature of participatory arts experiences.

This inquiry is autoethnographic in that it desires “to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 1). It is an inquiry that is “ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (Chang, 2008, p. 48). Thriving at the intersection of the personal and

the cultural (Laslett, 1999), it is a process and yet also a product, one where I am both the participant and the researcher.

As a reflexive methodology (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Glesne, 2011), it aims “to keep both the subject (knower) and object (that which is being examined) in simultaneous view” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 16). Although challenging I felt that through such an interplay, “the confessional becomes a self-reflective meditation on the nature of ethnographic understanding” (van Manen, 1988/2011, p. 92), and a deeper sense of the problem may be implored. I felt that such reflexivity could lend accessibility and facilitate understanding for others. I desired transparency and wanted the reader to feel the tensions, frustrations, and theatrics evident in my art experiences (Gallagher, 2007). I wanted to invite, if not entice others to join along in gaining a sense of what it would be like to be a participant in these experiential endeavors. I wanted to enable the reader to actively think *through* my experiences, as opposed to think about them (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Motivated to write in order to alter myself, to think anew, encompasses writing as method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). A form of discovery and yet analysis, it is a way of writing that connotes a personal relationship to research. It is a descriptive, lived way of insightfully writing. In this regard, I wanted to learn more about participatory art endeavors in contemporary art, but also to contribute substantively to our social world of understanding. An inquiry reaching beyond that of just me, I sought to lend generativity that could inform essential understandings of humanity.

Although autoethnography is an arts-based form useful in opening up new ways of understanding creatively through descriptive voice, I still perceive it having a greater

reliance on linguistic faculties. Just as the process of speaking falls under some erasure, so does the process of writing. Since art can qualitatively disclose complexities of meaning unaccounted for in linguistic capacity (Eisner, 1991; Langer, 1957), it can also help express the otherwise unseen, unheard, or unavailable. Exploiting “the capacities of expressive form to capture the qualities of life that impact what we know and how we live” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 5), we can use art to help make meaning for our world. Consequently, I chose to use art as another layer of depth for this inquiry of understanding.

Since impermeable qualities may more evocatively illustrate moments of life that are evanescent and lead to enlargement of mind and human understanding (Barone & Eisner, 2012), I wanted to open another way of uncovering meaning. Since participatory art is highly conceptual, I felt visual components may contribute to understanding through alterity. The communicative possibilities of visual art, or wording through pictures and images (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008), adds another potential layer or entry point for interpretation of this inquiry.

A sensorial being searching to inform ways of knowing, this arts-based autoethnography processually illustrates the ways in which I experienced social and participatory art forms en route to newly constructed informed conjectures. Traveling between my home state of Georgia, as well as London, New York, and Venice, I immersed myself in multiple, heterogeneous spaces of participatory art experiences for the purposes of this inquiry. Although I was sensitive to my interest in this topic for quite some time, from August 2012 to June 2013 I actively went in pursuit of art endeavors of a participatory nature.

Understanding that analysis of data begins when data is still being collected in process (Chang, 2008), this ongoing inquiry developed iteratively. A methodological design that enabled me to critically and reflexively consider the liminal spaces where I actively searched for understanding, this empirical endeavor was habitually reframed and refocused in order to conceptualize insights, induce conclusions, and establish further questions (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). Bolstering discovery through processes of play, experimentation, and assemblage, alongside that of disruption, destruction, and discontent, over weeks and months this inquiry underwent varied states of interpretation.

Recursively working to make sense of my experiences, I rigorously worked to make my subjectivity apparent. I systematically observed, wrote reflectively, discussed with others, and gathered documentary artifacts throughout my participatory art experiences. Throughout my numerous pages of handwritten notes, I hermeneutically worked to deconstruct and locate ways in which I could “invite the topic to say what it has not yet said about itself” (Freeman, 2011, p. 550).

Deconstructing and dissecting the data while reconstructing and making sense of it through interpretation, throughout this narrative analysis I borrowed from Wolcott’s (1994) qualitative analysis and interpretation strategies to give meaning and structure to my data. Specifically, my analysis and interpretation was a process whereby I looked for significant themes or patterns, sought to explain phenomena culturally and not just personally, looked to identify cultural themes, identified any exceptional occurrences, worked to connect the present with the past, analyzed relationships between myself and others, compared my participatory experiences with others, contextualize broadly, framed participatory art with

theories, and analyze my inclusions and omissions. These strategies are interwoven throughout this narrative inquiry.

Allowing concepts to gestate, throughout revisions, drafts, and re-writes, I worked and re-worked my data in my writing but also in visual representation. I implored artistic means to help give shape to what I was thinking, using visual representations as metaphors in communicating ideas while penetrating the unconscious (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). These visual metaphors were helpful in symbolizing ideas as they moved in and out of interpretation, in reconstructing and deconstructing the inquiry as it processually unfolded (Maxwell, 2013).

I used mixed media art to help mirror the complexity and layers of my thinking. Instrumental in assisting me as I kept track of data in collection and interpretation, my mixed media representations were part of my reflective process. In them I explored means of interpretation through drawing, painting, doodling, covering up, cutting out, stitching on, marking out, collaging (Butler-Kisber, 2008) and concept mapping (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). I used my research notes, assorted artifacts from my participatory art experiences, and even my drafts of this dissertation to deconstruct and reconstruct in an attempt to analyze and interpret the data. These were ways of reworking ideas integral to my thinking and analyzing as I experienced contemporary art, and it was useful in moving my understanding through various states of my analyzing and thinking.

Since many of my contemporary art experiences occurred discursively, I felt the use of some phrases, letters, and words in conjunction with visual representation was necessary. Throughout the mixed media processes, I deconstructed and reconstructed

the words that I'd written down or phrases I'd heard others around me say. Working to unpack their meaning, in some instances I displaced the prominence of legible language by striking through it or using it in phrases or states of decomposition as I felt it was a ways of capturing the emotional qualities, signs of struggle, and signs of breakthrough I experienced.

Moving in-between textual and visual representations, my autoethnographic artful processes operated over many months and weeks. Much like a hermeneutic poesis of revealing and concealing, at times my interpretations progressed fruitfully, though this was not always the case. There were many moments of struggle and times where I couldn't quite move forward. In these instances of contention, I tried to give pause to my process by lingering in these moments of frustration, enabling new possibilities or openings to emerge. Mindful in allowing elements of ambiguity and frustration to emerge, through language and artistic play as a vehicle for democratic innovation, I endeavored to help the tiny pieces of my interpretation fall into place. A practice of rigorous and regular, although not always systematic focus, the simultaneity of living, reading, writing, and creating were also ways of attending to my subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988; St. Pierre, 2011).

Since this inquiry is perpetually an incomplete work in the making, the art I have woven into this inquiry is all art that I created. It is not to be considered finished work. With no desired finite end or outcome, the art here is an elicitation of thinking and analyzing. Moreover, I added documentary photographs, or what I refer to as my photographic journals, as another window into my experiences with participatory art endeavors. Between my art and my photographic journals, I hope to provide an invitation and way of

seducing the reader into reentering similar experiences and understandings that I endured throughout this process (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

I chose to weave in photographs of my actual participatory experiences, or photographic journals, as well as poems and haikus as vignettes, within the body of this inquiry to yield more insight into this process. My hope in opening this inquiry up through narration, poetry, and art is to make not only my process clear but to also open up possibilities for others to think qualitatively as I did.

A contested social art practice in a contested arts-based methodology, there were innumerable challenges fraught with this work. Beleaguered by incessant frustrations in this inquiry, understanding was not always ostensible or achieved. Rupture occurs in moments of paradox, and since paradox is central to understanding, I included these instances of contradiction (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) in my writing and art. Espousing my frustrations, I was candid in conferring how these socio-political art forms were challenging my basic assumptions. I wanted to cultivate spaces for others to also test their basic conventions.

Some of my earliest frustrations derived from the notion that this was a participatory inquiry authored solitarily. Since this research was conducted for purposes of procuring a doctoral degree, I disliked but understood the burden of providing a single representation. I worked to move past my dissatisfaction that I was producing a mono-vocal account of a polyvalent, co-constructed endeavor. However, through Barton (2011), I was reminded that the self is porous. Although I was writing about my participatory art endeavors, my

experiences were intertwined with another's experience, and the presence of others could be identified alongside my own, inadvertently or not.

Since I was working so closely to others as a co-participant in experiential social endeavors, I realized that this inquiry was not impervious, and that others did have a voice in impacting this inquiry. Consequently, this created necessary ethical considerations worth evaluating (Tolich, 2010). I was attentive to experiences that could ethically be shared, and mindful of any potential blurry consent that may be harmful for others (Barton, 2011). In anticipation of any potential ethical dilemmas, I chose to obtain Institutional Review Board informed consent for this inquiry.

Though I wrote down some overheard responses from anonymous, unassuming participants, I made efforts not to use direct quotes, descriptions of participants, or photographs linking back to participants. Any words or phrases I did use were remixed and reworked into visual art or found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002) embedded throughout this inquiry. To me, this repurposing was a way of fusing the voices of others back with my own artfully, collaboratively, and interactively. While this helped appease my agitation about authoring solitarily, I still faced other vexations.

Another such frustration encountered in this inquiry derived from a management standpoint. While I pride myself on my attention to detail, the sheer voracity of aspects one manages in an arts-based autoethnography is quite extensive. Thoroughly challenged in making sense of the chaos, this inquiry demanded extensive responsiveness. A balancing act that was often difficult to manage, my patience and organizational keenness was regularly tested as I worked to manage a comprehensive account of on-going data

analysis and collection at participatory art endeavors. I was aided in this process by my numerous drafts and notes of this inquiry, which served as a comprehensive log.

At times in this process I doubted the veracity of my memory, I wondered about the disorienting power of speech, I questioned if I'd overwritten my experiences, I worried if I'd written with misplaced confidence, and I feared omitting vital occurrences. Unavoidable, this anxiety and uncertainty contributed to my apprehensiveness in opening myself to critique by others (Ellis, 1999; Slattery, 2001). I began to wonder if I'd ever be content with my emerging interpretations. I worried I would never get to a point in which I could assert this knowledge confidently in the world.

Aiming to make the unintelligible intelligible as best I could, my fragmented ways of working unfold through a discombobulated process. I suppose you could call it organic but to others, it is perhaps nearly a foreign language. A circuitous, often painstaking, and regularly exhausting process, it seems to work for me. Far from streamline, it was a process that tested my perseverance and shrewdness.

I have experienced art alongside innumerable frustrations; it seems frustrations permeate my living just as questions do. As I have stated, I relish difficult questions and provocations, but I have learned that I am slow to give interpretation shape. I enjoy giving pause to what is going on, to simmer in the analysis as I still collect the data. This is a durational process that will continue forward beyond the scope here, yet for now I share my experiences with art that invokes social and aesthetic concerns interlaced below.

•••••

Burgeoning anticipation
 Seeking collaboration, conceptualization
 Living with me
 Living with them

With anticipation
 Venturing questions, dissensions
 Participating dialectically
 Participating experientially

With anticipation
 Investigating ethics, aesthetics
 Stimulating politically
 Stimulating socially

With anticipation
 Cultivating transformation, amelioration
 Musing possibilities
 Musing opportunities

With anticipation
 Expecting activity, connectivity
 Awaiting investigation
 Awaiting delimitation

With anticipation
 Waning reception, perception
 Diminishing reliance
 Diminishing compliance

Abated anticipation
 Excruciating tranquility, passivity
 Living with me?
 Living with them?

•••••

CHAPTER TWO: ENDEAVORING EXPERIENCE

Endeavoring Participatory Engagement

Enticed yet still confounded by participatory experiential artistic practices, I felt participation in these endeavors would help me better understand. Rather than accept what I'd complacently and blindly read, I wanted to find out more for myself by living these experiences first-hand. Beginning with a deep investigation into what I felt art was and what I perceived participatory art trying to achieve, I endeavored to experience art differently by opening my self up to new ideas about art. I made thorough notes of my bias and perceptions about art, while I also tried to make space for new thinking.

While on vacation and with a bit of luck, I found an exhibition at London's Tate Modern that was participatory in nature. Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's *Surplus Value* (2012) was my first experience with an experiential, participatory form of art. Aware of her work and her conviction that art should be useful, I understood her aesthetic situations to be forms of behavior art. Cognizant that Bruguera desired unscripted contexts and situations, I was aware that the actions of others, namely that the actions of participants were vital in bringing the art to fruition.

Optimistic this event would physically, socially, and intellectually challenge me; I made my way over to an area where other individuals were already formed in a roped-off queue. Appearing to wait for the entrance of a closed-door exhibition space to open, the

line didn't seem too menacingly lengthy, yet I was surprised there was a line at all.

Although I'd rarely waited in exhibition lines in an art museum, I figured it couldn't take that long before the next group was transported into the exhibition space behind closed doors.

A few minutes later in the non-moving queue, however, I realized two things. One, that Tate Modern had an excess of museum guards and assistants patrolling the exhibition entrance and the queue, and two, that there was a seated official of some sort with a polygraph machine at the front of the queue. Confounded that I would be subjected to a polygraph screening, which was about nationalism and identity, I, like the others around me were intrigued, if not anxiety-ridden. Even though I was attending Tate Modern solo that day, I tried to make sense of this occurrence by talking to the others standing in line with me. In an attempt to glean information about this endeavor, periodically those of us in line would ask the museum guards and assistants questions. Often receiving simple "yes" or "no" answers, I started to become frustrated, and I felt a similar growing vexation from others as well.

Fascinatingly, it became apparent that the museum guards and assistants were periodically and randomly choosing select individuals to advance into the exhibition space behind closed doors. Unfairly and peculiarly, the guards were allowing museum visitors, some in the queue and others not, to circumvent both the queue and the polygraph entirely. There seemed to be no logical way in which one was chosen, but standing in line, it was noticeable that the guards and assistants held the power in this dynamic as they had authority in selecting those who would be admitted into the exhibition space.



IMAGE 2.1: *Not so patiently waiting*, 2012, photographic journal

I will admit that seeing others “jump” the line ahead of me and my patiently waiting companions was more than infuriating. Bound by moments of angst, obstinacy, and perhaps misunderstanding, I tried to consider such provocations as educative or as a part of the process. Tenaciously working through these issues as best I could, I worked to put a spirit of inquiry at the forefront, yet my annoyance was mounting and getting the better part of me. Feeling that I was wasting my time and only being cheated by a system of

favoritism of which I was not a part, I gave up. Unceremoniously I called it quits on this inane art experiment. Stepping aside from the queue, I was infuriated by the arrogance of the artist that designed such an asinine art event, I was chagrined that I was expected to stand in a nearly non-moving line for prolonged periods of time, and further infuriated by museum assistants' cryptic and dismissive attitudes.

Throwing in the towel, angry that I'd just spent forty-five minutes of my precious existence in a stupid line, I recognized a woman that was allowed into the exhibition space behind closed doors. She was one among approximately twenty other individuals I'd seen successfully navigate this art experience. This woman somehow engaged with the museum guards and assistants well enough that she was allowed to skip the entire line, including me, and although she was only in the exhibition space for a few minutes, I was curious about her reaction. She briefly shared with me how her experience was enlightening. Although she was vague in her explication, she said that it was exciting to be faced with a uniquely, challenging form of art.

She briefly, but again vaguely, described what she'd witnessed behind the closed exhibitions doors and strongly advised me to return back to the piece and try once more. I told her that although I was compelled by her persuasion, I was only in London for another several days and had other obligations that day. She said that she, too, was from out of town and traveling, so she used this as part of her motivation in speaking to the museum guard in the first place. The woman said she wanted to know the art piece by Bruguera, so she literally asked the museum guard, and then quickly negotiated her way into the

space through the guard. Intrigued but not entirely convinced I wanted to invest any more time with this experience, I left the museum.

That afternoon, all I could do was think about the experience and where I went wrong. The bulk of my frustration in that experience was that I was never permitted into the closed off exhibition space—I felt that I didn't completely fulfill the art experience. Although I felt I'd tried, somehow I hadn't engaged or participated in the right ways in order to be allowed into the closed off exhibition space. Perplexed, I couldn't quite figure it out. A highly competitive person by nature, a few days later I returned undeterred. I breezed past the entire queue that had formed again that day, made my way to the front of the exhibition area, and found a museum guard to address. The guard advised me that in order to proceed into the exhibition behind the closed doors, I needed to queue.

Rejecting this advice, I politely re-told my experience from a few days prior. I conveyed my frustration to the guard, expressing that I'd spent over forty-five minutes waiting in line to no avail. Fortunately, this worked and the museum guard began walking me to the front of the exhibition space. Navigating past the entire line of patiently waiting participants, I could feel their eyes on me. Feeling guilty, like I'd cheated those still patiently waiting in the queue, I didn't have long to process this emotion as I was quickly enclosed in a dimly lit space behind the doors of the closed off exhibition area.

Shifting my eyes from a well-lit public space into this darker, more exclusionary and very quiet space, I saw a man who appeared to be welding the contours of a metal structure. Since the structure appeared to have some German text, a language I do not understand, in that moment I didn't invest much time into making sense of it. I was instead

more captivated by the spray of fleeting sparks flying across the dimly lit space as he welded. Walking and observing this cavernous and circular space, trying to make sense of this experience I vied for, I wondered if this welding was the experience? Was this what I'd worked so passionately for?

In critically reexamining my experience with *Surplus Value* (2012) that particular day and for many more days to come, the circumstances of art as a form of experience became more vibrant for me. Since I'd reexamined aspects of this experience in my head numerous times, it didn't take me long to realize the welding performance was not the art per se. The art was not in the exhibition space where I was still standing; the art was in the experience and inherent tensions of the live event.

Upon retuning home to the United States, I thought more about my experience with participatory art at Tate Modern. I felt compelled to better understand the participatory experience, and found a video online on the Tate Modern's website where Bruguera spoke in detail about the art. Upon listening and then reflecting about what she expressed, I realized that there were major gaps in my interpretation and her explanation. Apparently there were several things that were important to her that I just quite frankly skipped over, missed, or didn't explore (e.g., the relevance of metal structure with German text tied to Nazi concentration camps and subversion). From the video, I learned that since this art was site-specific and timed to coincide with the 2012 London Olympics, Bruguera's work was to nationalism and her interests in immigration.

I began to wonder how and why there was such disconnect between my interpretation and Bruguera's explanation or intention. I also wondered about the ways in

which others may have interpreted that same experience differently. How was it possible I missed so much about the meaning of this endeavor, yet felt energized by it? How could I have better made meaning in this experience that was closer to what Bruguera intended? What meaning making opportunities did I overlook that others may have picked up on? What made me so persistent in wanting to experience this art? How many people never realized it was art? How many participants were never admitted behind the closed off doors? Since the endeavor was extensively consuming valuable time, in what ways does the fluidity or openness of a participatory work hinder its potential success?

Conditions of Understanding

Following O'Donoghue (2009), I began questioning how we create the conditions for interpretation and understanding. I considered the ways in which we cultivate the necessary or ideal conditions for meaning making to occur, especially those of a participatory or experiential nature. What can better prepare us for these experiences? What can better prepare us for openness to an aesthetic experience? When opportunities for interpretation are adrift, in what ways can we reconnect back to them?

Experiences are not all bound with equally engaging properties; art affects us all differently. Pierre Bourdieu (1979/1984) suggested that art has significance for those who have means of appropriating and interpreting it. In other words art has the capacity to be meaningful or interesting for those who have presupposed or informed understanding about art. In this sense, when we decipher, decode, or "read" art, we use a set of informed sense capacities and cultural competencies to understand art. Among them, our background with art, our race, our culture, our gender, and our sexuality. Affect also plays

a role in the production of meaning as our aesthetic responses are tied to our emotional capacities (Currie, 2004). How things make us feel also influences how we think, and feeling may affect the ways in which we elicit meaning through art.

Outside of us, there are situational and contextual implications that may also be impactful in determining how we create meaning for art. We operate in a complexity of milieus, events, qualities, substances, practices, and circumstances (Deleuze, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) that affect our daily lives. Ideas migrate and shift; they have liquidity. Connected within our world, these vibratory components are part of the fluid communicative process. Imparting attentiveness between people and materials, there are dynamic energies flowing through and around us (Bennett, 2010). The otherness of a situation encompasses the material of a given space or time in qualities, substances, forces, and dramas; these may also inhibit or enhance opportunities for interpretation and meaning making in art.

While the varied conditions of art make it possible to experience deeply and meaningfully, the openness of art may just as easily encumber understanding (Jackson, 2011). Without these informed capacities, we are not prevented from having a fruitful experience with art. Rather, when such codes are lacking, the percipient may feel lost or confused in art, creating more difficult conditions for interpretation. Often new or innovative experiences with art make us uncomfortable as they confront us with what we don't know and sometimes don't want to know. Perceived as an apparent failure or inability to recognize within experience, this discomfiting quandary with novel art experiences may result in sense of loss or sudden exile (Steinberg, 1972/2007). Appearing foreign and

jolting us, subsequently shocking and enraging us, novel art is viewed as alarming and alien, and often we further distance ourselves from it (Becker, 1994).

In such cases, I believe persistency and a willingness to understand are important. Interpretation is not a straightforward process, but one of active participation; we must make an effort to understand (Gadamer, 1977/1986). As a hermeneutic act, art's meaning does not lie on the surface; we often must unearth and search for deeper meaning (Freeman, 2008). Meaning making that takes effort, and depending on the degree of our participation, or the level of commitment we are willing to invest, we may or may not encounter understanding with art if sufficient effort is not exerted.

Art does not retain timelessness in meaning or interpretation. Since interpretation undergoes shifting historical, cultural, and theoretical influences (Freeman, de Marrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007), each time we bring meaning into understanding through experience, it is a uniquely distinct, unrepeatable, and unfinished event. We cannot encounter meaning or experience the same—they are not identically repeatable, yet we can re-encounter something similar. This being said, we may return to art time and time again learning something from it differently each time.

Dialogue with art can deepen our understanding of self and each other (Gadamer, 1977/1986). I feel when we are more aware of the conditions for making meaning in art; we may be more valiantly rewarded in our experience with the varied artistic forms of practice, including those of a participatory and experiential nature. The varied conditions of art open up many questions of accessibility not only for us, but for others, and the contexts in which interpretation takes place. These conditions are worth further exploration

as new models and modes of art continues to shift in and out of our contemporary moment (Bourdieu, 1993).



IMAGE 2.2: *Weaving my words*, 2013, mixed media

More accustomed to encounters with art that were didactic, Bruguera's *Surplus Value* (2012) experience for me was different. Arresting in the sense that the experience provoked a mild uneasiness that challenged and opened up my thinking, I came to better understand how paradox is also useful to this enactment of understanding. Efforting and laboring through this experience, even as I turned my back on the experience the first time, I came back determined to understand. I found that opportunities to contemplate, to

grapple with questions, to dialectally engage, and to potentially act alongside others is important in the participatory process. Even if unrealized within the particular moment, these engagements also contribute to the potential success or failure of interpreting art.

Bruguera's *Surplus Value* (2012) experience was the first time I'd experienced live or living art as a participant. Since I have a lengthy background in art and art education, I believe my informed sense capacities and percipience first and foremost helped me understand. Moreover, I believe that my insight about the participatory and experiential context aided me in the process, as did my openness in attitude to the experience, my persistency and commitment to understand, as well my recognition of affect in the situation. As a willing participant engaging dialectically with others, through my purposeful naïveté, I enacted a mindset daring to revel in chaos, in the unknown, and in play. I persistently and determinately wanted to embrace understanding and committed myself to it. I endeavored to find deeper meaning in my experience but I also wondered if I actually found it? Did meaningful engagement occur or it just a favorable, novel experience?

Paradoxically Pushing Forward

Aside from recognizing that my experience with Bruguera's *Surplus Value* (2012) was fruitful I also became aware of a newfound, disturbing, yet personal concern. In picking apart and pulling back the layers of this experience, I came to understand how and why I was initially unable to comprehend these participatory, contemporary art manifestations. Though unaware at the time, I was practicing a flagrant, yet inadvertent form of art elitism. Heralding the belief that art was first and foremost a visual, materialized product—namely a three-dimensional form, a painting, an etching, or so on—I was

stripping art of its lived experience. In perceiving art as an artifact produced by someone for someone, I was thereby restricting its potential. I was not permitting art to actually manifest experientially.

Sadly in my narrow mind, I'd also relegated the remainder of the art world, namely the performative arts, into a subjugated classification—they were secondary to their object-based counterparts. Privileging the visual while ostracizing the performative, my demarcation was decidedly disconcerting. Prior to my experience with Bruguera's *Surplus Value* (2012), I wasn't much aware of this artful discrimination. Jolted as I came to terms with my art selectivity, I was unsettled and embarrassed.

With a culturally rich arts upbringing by parents who valued and were also educated in the arts, I felt I knew better. I perceived art to be a valuable aspect of the human experience (i.e., Desmond, 2011; Dissanayake, 1992; Eaton, 2001). I knew that art gives significance and meaning to our lives, that art plays a fundamental role in our existence...or at least I thought I knew. I guess I'd been going through life thinking I understood what art offered, yet also assigning parameters for it. I suppose I just never dealt with these terms because I wasn't fully aware they were issues.

Although unable to precisely pinpoint how my accidental art elitism came to be, I would speculate that it occurred over time and through many confluences. While likely deriving as a part of my learning environment, there is also no doubt I had a major hand in this lunacy. I cultivated a negligence and naïveté that not only privileged but also perpetuated the prominence of art's materiality yet I was prepared to unlearn and further examine my beliefs about aesthetics and art. I wanted to further suspend what I thought

was right, good, or true. I wanted to shake off tired dualisms and prejudices fostered; I wanted to shake myself from complacency.

I decided to further let go of the old me. I wanted to let go and leave behind, to unlock opportunities for new learning to originate. As a form of a creative deconstruction, I began to try unlearning in order to learn. A positive form of unlearning that educes fresh perspective, this entailed a willingness to move beyond, a shifting of mindset. Although I cannot force openness in deconstructing, and openness alone cannot drive change, I felt I could start with my perceptions. Since I consciously develop and learn some behaviors, I felt I could also potentially unlearn them. Though such efforts may require moments of dissimilitude and contradiction, and I may be forced to grapple with questions that are not pedestrian or easy, I felt that was potentially within these challenging tenets where I could potentially encounter new meaning, leading to transformation in our existence.

Recognizing, yet still coming to terms with my art prejudice, I thought the surface of my art ignorance was cracking and crumbling. Since I was now mindful of this bias, I tried to press forward in this inquiry of understanding with more openness. I wanted the hard lines of demarcation to become more fluid as I attempted to grapple with acceptance of unknowingness, so I pressed forward as best I could with an open mind. With an orientation and motivation guiding me to rediscovery, I sought deeper examination. I sought more social participatory art experience.

CHAPTER THREE:
POLITICAL AESTHETICS

Reexamining Participatory Circumstances

Locating my place in the world by moving into spaces, by experiencing, I sought contemporary art experiences to enact further understanding for social and participatory art. I felt that I needed more experience with these artistic forms of practice in order to further inform my conceptualizations of them. I desired some sort of experiential fluency that could provide me with understanding into these complexities. Little did I realize how difficult these art experiences would be to locate.

Extensively researching, opportunities for local or regional participatory art engagement proved extremely difficult to find. No matter where or how hard I researched, I simply could not locate experiences. For an art practice that was seemingly omnipresent, I had an arduous time locating potential endeavors to engage with it. I decided that if local and regional endeavors were challenging to locate, I needed to expand my scope. Fervently working to find information, I searched online, looking at museum webpages, digital art magazines, and varied forms of social media, regularly subscribing my email address to their lists in hopes of better staying abreast of any potential or relevant contemporary art events.

Dismayed as I still was unable to find participatory art experiences for several weeks, I chalked it up to poor timing but didn't give up. Instead, I temporarily turned my

energy toward any relevant books, scholarly publications, art journals and magazines, and social media outlets in trying to learn more about these manifestations. I decided to invest more time into learning about past participatory art endeavors and the varied perspectives and opinions about it all. I tried to filter through all of this information, working to locate my own voice and opinion.

Trying to keep frustrations at bay, several weeks went by. I kept searching and questioning these contemporary art forms. I started to doubt this inquiry, as well as myself. I discussed my challenges with anyone willing to listen, but it wasn't until a conversation with an advisor on my doctoral committee where I realized I was the root of the problem. I still hung up on defining art. In my research attempts to locate social and participatory art experiences, I was inadvertently looking for an idealized version of what this art would entail. Initially outraged that I was still placing boundaries around what art was and what art wasn't, or more specifically what participatory art was and wasn't. I remorsefully realized this was the case.

I came to see that I was comparing any other potential participatory experiences to my *Surplus Value* (2012) experience, which I'd begun privileging as the pinnacle of art as experience. Since it was the only example of participatory engagement I could understand as a result of my first-hand involvements with it, I was unfairly comparing everything else to it. Subsequently, in researching opportunities for participatory experience, I was unable to locate any other accounts of contemporary art practice that seemed close to what the London experience offered. I suppose I was looking for similar conditions and circumstances, and when I couldn't find anything closely resembling it, I disregarded them

all as inferior. Even though I was defining differently, I was still delineating, and it was still worrisome. I began to wonder if it was possible to narrow what these participatory art practices were doing without defining them.

Not so expeditiously I went back to the drawing board to attain fresh eyes. I re-read and worked to re-interpret nearly everything I'd already wrestled with. I pressed forward in journaling and discussion with graduate colleagues and professors, sharing much of my plight along the way. Since participatory art was still an emerging practice in art, I recurrently sought out any new scholarship that could continue to aid me my interpretations of this art. I read eclectically and looked for scholarship that could help me make sense in voyaging with new eyes.

I reexamined and re-read an early text by curator Nicolas Bourriaud. In his *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2002) Bourriaud 's philosophy worked toward the democratization of art in rethinking its possibility and representation. For him, a relational art was "an art taking its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space" (p. 14). Bourriaud's aesthetic of relations was one of interactivity and discourse through an event, or experience. While Bourriaud's work continues to be widely critiqued as lacking critical or political force (e.g., see Bishop's critique of Bourriaud, 2012a or Rancière's critique of Bourriaud, 2000/2004, 2009b), it was foundational in re-enlivening contemporary aesthetic conversations not only for me, but also for others in art education, aesthetics, performance studies, curatorial studies, museum studies, and beyond.

For a while I used Bourriaud's relational art terminologies in talking about a participatory form of contemporary art, later settling on participatory art (Bishop, 2012a). Other references to art of a social orientation have included: social practice art (Sholette, 2012), socially engaged art (Thompson, 2012), useful art (Bruguera & Chen, 2012), interventionist art (Richardson, 2010; Thompson, 2004), dialogical art (Kester, 2004), collaborative art (Downey, 2009; Kester, 2011), conversational art (Bhabha, 1998), new genre public art (Lacy, 1995), social aesthetics (Larsen, 1999), social cooperation (Finkelpearl, 2013) and contextual aesthetics (Berleant, 2005), among others. For a while I was quite engrossed in "getting the name right," as I felt I was unable to find an adequate name for what these social orientations in art were trying to achieve.

In researching them further, I came to understand that these terms are not synonymous (i.e., where useful art aims to be emancipatory in nature, others such as socially engaged art may not always share such ambitions). However, I found commonalities in conception—many of these terms place live human agents and experience at the forefront for an art of community, collaboration, and participation. Moreover, they were similarly motivated by the ways in which art shapes society through participation on some level.

Despite understanding these commonalities, and the notion that many of these names felt resolutely imprecise, I came to see that issues of nomenclature are frivolous. Instead of drawing futile, narrow conclusions that only end up restricting, I needed to be more focused on deterritorializing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972), or opening up. I needed to remind myself, again, to resist dichotomous ways of thinking that perpetuate dualisms.

Since this inquiry isn't concerned with defining another form of art, but about attempting greater, more informed understanding of participatory art, I moved away from self-defeating attempts to narrow, trying to be mindful that it is not as important to locate art in name but rather in feeling, in motivation, and in quality.

.....

atop my concern
 art as an experience
 doubting its being

.....

Political Aesthetics and Aesthetic Qualities

Questions pertaining to the nature of aesthetics are contentious, elusive, and they are commonly bred with prevalent cultural misunderstandings (Johnson, 2007; Rancière, 2004/2009a; Shusterman, 1997; Tavin, 2007). Following Gablik (1991), I wondered about the ways political and social concerns inform aesthetics. Interpreting aesthetics as adaptable and evolutionary (Carroll, 2001; Currie, 2004), I join the voices of others who have called for a reconceived aesthetic with relevancy for our contemporary lives (e.g.,

Dewey, 1934/2005; Duncum, 2007; Gablik, 1991; 1995; Shusterman, 2000b). For me, as well as many others, this is a way of viewing aesthetics politically (e.g., Baldacchino, 2012; Bishop, 2004, 2006, 2012a, 2012b; Jackson, 2011; Jagodzinski, 2010a, 2010b; Rancière, 2000/2004, 2004/2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2011/2103; Spivak, 2012; Tavin 2007, 2008).

Through Baumgarten, and later Schiller's fifteenth letter in his *Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795/1967), we can begin to conceive of a political aesthetic. Schiller describes Spieltrieb, or "free drive," as an active force that occurs within a contradictory double bind between oppositions. Essentially, there is an autonomous suspension yet tension, where space is yielded and potentially new ideas, alternatives, and opportunities can grow. Posing questions, yet assuming no answers, these are contradictions that exist through synergetic elements of a "delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (Rancière, 2000/2004, p. 13).

I am interested in the ways participatory art often evokes characteristics of a political aesthetic. Though art is subject to contingency and is often political (Stewart, 2005), a political aesthetic is not necessarily concerned with overtly political art content. Rather, it is a motivation or way of doing or thinking about art politically. Art can be politically motivated, though not necessarily transformative.

A political aesthetic has characteristics, or a flexible range of aesthetic properties. I refer to these as aesthetic qualities. Potentials, or ideologies that may exist within a political aesthetic experience, aesthetic qualities may be understood as suggestions for the ways in which we may attend to certain features of art and living (Weitz, 1956). Temporally asking

to attend to our living, aesthetic qualities fluidly and animately are ways of orienting ourselves toward a potentiality (jagodzinski, 2010b) of vast alternative spaces of contemplation. In a sense, they enable a way of being through a “wider domain of resonance” (Kaprow, 1986/2003, p. 221).

Carrying a coherency of attributes, aesthetic qualities share a fluidity of political, ethical, social and embodied corollaries. Again, these are qualities, or potentials, not necessarily definitions, and therefore, they are not all weighted with the same resonance within an art endeavor. More over, aesthetic qualities are not only found in forms of participatory art but may be found in art of varied manifestations since art is not bound to a single aesthetic trajectory, genre, or meaning.

Intertwined with the original aesthetic conceptualization of *aisthesis* (jagodzinski, 2010a, 2010b; Rancière, 2011/2013), as a sensory perception apt for artistic manifestations, a political aesthetic is situated in living. Erasing demarcations of disciplines and borders in art while reinstating them to lived experience; political aesthetics concerns matters of process and experience over those of product and object. Understood in the sense that art may not take shape physically, but rather in the autonomous realm of experience where there is no privileged medium, political affiliation, or meaning (Bishop, 2012a), a political aesthetic is art of animacy. Therefore, in this sense, participatory art is not anti-aesthetic; it is being aesthetic.

Ascribing contradiction in our lives and in our thinking, a political aesthetic is far greater than a demanding work of art; it is that of thriving and living well (Tanke, 2010). Aesthetics is ethical living and situates thinking experientially, or in our living, not apart from

it. A way of being with art, it is essentially our living that becomes a work of art—art as incarnate, as personified. Any art that uses people as a medium, as in the case of participatory art, cannot be divorced from ethics; it is fundamentally rooted in axiology.



IMAGE 3.1: *Aesthetic qualities*, 2013, mixed media

Bound in everyday experience and engagement, living is ethically imbued as it calls not only on us to attend to the self as a way of living, or to the self an ethical subject (Foucault, 1997), but it also carries concern for others. Existing in ethical states of encounter, an aesthetic of human experience is relational. Alongside others in the world, is

a way of ethical, relational knowing (Gradle, 2007). Crafted disharmoniously, yet responsively and compassionately, empathy is engendered for others through dynamic, caring relationships (Noddings, 2007), communities of compassion are cultivated.

A political aesthetic acknowledges that we do not experience the world independently or vacuously, but exist among multiplicity and fragmentation (Nietzsche, 1887/1967). Discarding the Western essentialist, solipsistic myth of a unified self, knowledge and being is plural. We are welcome to intricately and contradictorily craft our place in this world alongside others (de Certeau, 1980/1984). As we fashion ourselves in continually becoming beings in a dynamically constructed world (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987), we are shaped within an unending event with others.

A way of interrogating vast fields of knowledge, this knowing upends and de-emphasizes solitary authored traditions (Barthes, 1968/1977; Eco, 1962/1989) in place of broadened network of relations. A political aesthetic values collaborative forms of inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1997) that take shape within a community of practice (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). It is a practice equipping individuals with a voice in their creation (Woodmansee, 1994) alongside that of another, while knowing that there would be no me without we. There is recognition of others in order to know us. Within such collectivity, there is an acknowledgement that one form of understanding occurs linguistically, and is an ontological, sociocultural, and mediated process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1991; Gadamer, 1960/2004; Gergen, 1994; Schwandt, 2000, 2007).

Although our voices together contribute to crafting knowledge in the world, discursive meaning shifts. Knowledge isn't fixed; it undergoes co-constructed creations,

negotiations, and modifications (Schwandt, 2000). Yet, these are deliberate, intentional forms of dialectical engagement. Within discourse there are concerted efforts to elicit quality understanding, and from this standpoint, such discourse is “an opening of shared life in which one is able to hear the voice of the other” (Risser, 2012, p. 53). It is an interested, invested attempt to ascertain insight.

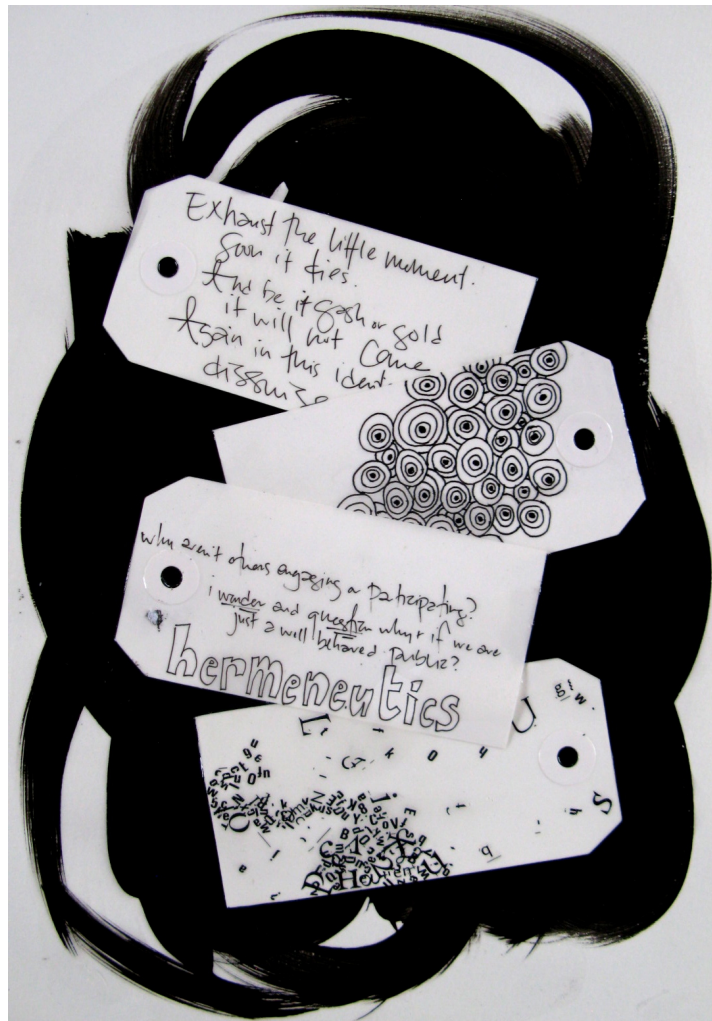


IMAGE 3.2: *Hermeneutically motivated*, 2013, mixed media

Understanding the voice of another is not idealistic, however. Dialogical understanding does not necessarily equate agreement, nor is that necessarily a desired

outcome. It does not seek echo chambers but invites dwelling of disharmonious relations. It lives in heterogeneity (Rancière, 2004/2009a), or in a state of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984/1998a). In this regard, understanding operates not in “a moment of utopia but a disarticulation of power in the present” (Ziarek, 2002, p. 98). Necessitating imbalances, intersubjective exchanges rely on destabilization at varied points and varied degrees.

Cohesive, yet not ideologically utopian, the formation of political communities of sense (Rancière, 2009b) allow for a destabilizing form of discourses. Viewed positively, such dissemblance and dissensus (Rancière, 2010) is necessary as they work in opposition to idealized forms of consensus that can lead to false emancipatory hopes (e.g., Benjamin, 1936/2008). In this sense, the unworking of community homogenization renders the welfare of a community more viable (Blanchot 1969/1993; Nancy, 1986/1991). Within such dissension in relations, the success of a community is determined by the formation of relations that are “contingent, rather than rigidly composed by either a formalist logic or a unified ideological program” (Rancière, 2010, p. 16).

Conversely, there are embodied qualities of a political aesthetic. More than what is perceptible visibly, these are qualities of corporeality, of perceptiveness. Grounded in poetic, temporal ways of knowing, aesthetics contain qualities of another way of knowing nonlinguistically (i.e., Collingwood, 1958/1938; Dewey, 1934/2005; Greene, 1978, 1995, 2001; Shusterman, 1997, 2000a, 2000b). Engendering phenomenological understanding, “meaning making is fundamentally aesthetic and embodied” (White, 2010, p. 16). Occurring within the unsaid or unspoken moments of life, these are the perceptive, felt, and corporeal ways in which we interpret the world.

Casting mind/body dualisms to the side, it is a way of imparting physicality of senses in a way where language is no longer privileged knowledge (Ramachandran, 2003). These are not *a priori* forms of knowing based in criticism, or judgment, but in the ways in which we affirm the importance of the body. Aesthetics lives in experience in terms of an ability to perceive. Cultivated in our consciousness, an embodiment of understanding exists as cognitive achievement outside of language. As somatic forms of knowledge (Eisner, 2002), they transpire perceptively, affectively, and symbolically through a variety of imaginative nuances (Efland, 2002; 2004a; 2004b; Goodman, 1976).

Dewey referred to these nuances as pervasive qualities (Dewey, 1931). Making a case for experience, Dewey argued that pervasive qualities connect aesthetics to the lived experience, suggesting that it is within experience where objects (i.e., works of art) emerge from relations of qualities, and “experienced situations are the soil from which the object, properties, and relations of our world grow” (Johnson, 2007, p. 77). Dewey often used works of art to articulate the importance of relations of qualities, suggesting that:

To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical.

Indeed, since words are easily manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being ‘intellectuals.’ (p. 47)

By advocating for the understanding and awareness of relations of qualities, Dewey was suggesting that these achievements of mind, though potentially more conceptually

complex than those of language, offered pensiveness as knowing. Such perceptual expressions of experience (Croce, 1902/1992, 1913/1995; Vico, 1725/2002) are the ways in which art provides a structure through which thinking unfolds. Since art lives in experience, it is through such alternative forms of representation (Eisner, 1994, 1997, 2002) where we may encounter innumerable opportunities to make sense of our world.

Through these opportunities of alterity we are challenged to think and rethink our world more attentively and more consciously. We are afforded ways in which embodied aesthetic philosophies connect us to others and to our world (Gablik, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997). These affective qualities are ways of processually opening us up to the alternative forms of representation where we can release our imagination (Greene, 1995). Through pure, inexhaustible possibilities of aesthetics, as pedagogue, pupil, or otherwise, “we may be in the world differently—feeling ourselves in process, in quest, working together as seekers, as questions in what we sometimes call the learning community” (Greene, 2001, p. 123).

Embodied and relationally among social others, opportunities of change and choice beyond imposed normative limitations may be explored and imparted; implicit in a political aesthetic are transformative modalities. These social, political, relational, and ethical corollaries encourage working the borderlands in moving beyond conceived intentions (Gitlin, 2009) to yield opportunities that may show us what is possible in our living. In this sense, questions of power and status can be contested, consequently opening up unexplored aspects or options for living that may spur new potentials by encouraging border crossing and multiplicity (Giroux, 1992; Slattery, 2003). In this sense, political

aesthetic engagements can be construed as potentials for presenting opportunities that may contribute to better ways of life (Spivak, 2012).

I believe aesthetic qualities may offer a fluid framework in which we can begin to think of art in experience as it pertains to our living through participation. In conceiving of aesthetic qualities, I worked to uphold a hermeneutically conscious aesthetic attitude, or what I call aesthetic hermetude. It is a tendency or disposition of healthy skepticism and care in navigating the manifestations of art living politically in experience. Using this aptness for questioning, I feel I have tried to best work through these qualities. However, as contemporary art continually shapes itself, my work here will demand continued reexamination. Again, this range of qualities demands continued reflexivity and criticality; there is capaciousness here for others to bring forth other ideas, different questions, and alternative interpretations. I invite others to contemplate and interrogate these aesthetic qualities.

CHAPTER FOUR:

PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCE

Museological Participatory Experience



IMAGE 4.1: *Splendid playground*, 2013, photographic journal

Still looking for opportunities to help inform understanding of participatory art, I received an emailed press release via the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. This email contained information about an up-coming exhibition at that appeared to be related to art

of a participatory nature. Interpreting the exhibition as a presentation of an art collective with degrees of diverse temporality, I decided that since I'd faced such difficulty in locating local or regional social art endeavors, this one might be worth exploring. I decided to attend the Guggenheim Museum's *Gutai: Splendid Playground* exhibition in New York City in February 2013.

The Gutai group, a Japanese avant-garde collective of the postwar era, worked within synergetic fringes of the visual and the performative. The Gutai group radically explored conceptual, experimental art; they worked to open, if not break, boundaries while challenging convention. Believing that "art is a site where creation occurs" (Tiampo & Munroe, 2013, p. 18), they sought undertakings that fostered opportunities of thinking and acting creatively. The Gutai group desired to bring art into life and went about doing it by incorporating kinetic, sound, and light in their works.

Attending the Gutai exhibition on its opening week, the Guggenheim had a couple of technical difficulties for some of the Gutai works. Tolerant of complications in exhibiting radical works of art from the 1950s and 1960s, I was disappointed that these works were non-functional during my visit. While at the museum, I read about these particular non-functioning endeavors, which appeared to have a participatory dimension. Desiring understanding through actual hands-on participation, I was frustrated by what knowledge might have been imparted from them had they been operating.

Instead, I tried to focus on learning from the available experiences and content on hand. Although the Gutai group may not have used the term *participation* explicitly to describe their artistic motivations, I interpreted their beliefs and practices to be

participative. For me, Gutai's diverse and creative works were participatory in the sense that they were woven with socially negotiated, ephemeral, and investigational inferences. Furthermore, many of Gutai's practices were politically imbued. Ironically I felt the Guggenheim exhibition did little to engage museumgoers with opportunities to scratch the surface of political participative engagement.

Even though I was interacting with the works, which were in some instances recreations of the original, I was discontented. My malcontent did not pertain to how much or how little I enjoyed the exhibition—in fact, I enjoyed it extensively. My dissatisfaction derived from the realization that I felt I wasn't endowed with prospects of a political aesthetic of participation. I didn't participate in the ways I'd anticipated. Looking for aesthetic qualities, I wanted social and embodied aesthetic qualities. I was looking for dissensus; I was hoping others might engage with me. Moreover, I thought such aesthetic qualities might lead me to an aesthetic experience. I suppose I went to the Guggenheim expecting too much.

Perhaps no fault other than my own, I then considered the impact of the museum. The museum context is filtered and as a museumgoer, I was guided by a curatorial voice that I felt spoke of participation, yet left it unrealized. Primarily displayed in a receptive fashion for museum attendees to read about or see, I was disappointed by the scarcity of available participatory points of entry for museumgoers. Activities and engagements for museumgoers were dispersed throughout the Gutai exhibition, yet I did not quite feel welcome in participating.

Intimated by the close and rigorous patrolling of the Guggenheim staff members, it seemed that many museumgoers, myself included, were apprehensive in participating with the Gutai exhibition when opportunities were available. In some areas of the museum, as well as in this particular exhibition, I saw patrons often reprimanded when attempting to take photographs of art (as this is prohibited by the museum). While I certainly fathom the rules and implications of such protection, I felt the museum's watchful surveillance contributed to a climate of apprehension. Consequently, I felt this apprehension compounded confusion as to whether or not museumgoers should or could participate in some of the interactive exhibition elements.

Cultivating a positive, welcoming climate for museumgoers is integral in the success or failure of participation in the museum (Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2000; Henry, 2010). I feel that strategic contextual placement of participative art endeavors is critical in the art museum if the goal is to increase or invite engagement of museumgoers as participants in the educative process. Reflecting on this experience, I began to see how the role of the participant and the role of the institution are important in making meaning. I wondered what I, as well as the Guggenheim, could have done to better in creating opportunities for participatory meaning making to unfold this instance. I also wondered if this work were outside of an institutional context, would it have equal, more, or less resonance.

One final, meaningful point of significance I took away from the Gutai exhibition was a reminder that participatory experience in art was not entirely innovative; our contemporary manifestations borrow closely from our past. Unfamiliar with the Gutai group's beliefs and practices prior to the Guggenheim exhibition, I was prompted to recall

the ways art has similarly manifested experientially. Art with a social orientation brings to mind similar artistic practices of the past that include the Gutai group, as well as Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Dada, Pop Art, Happenings, Situationism, Fluxus, Tropicália, Conceptual art, and Performance art.

Resurfacing altered yet through varied auspices, designations, periods of time, and wide global contexts, these social and participatory practices often voiced unorthodox aesthetic convictions for their respective times. Often, political unrest was the impetus for art of a participatory nature (Bishop, 2012a). Espousing similar values in that they shared significant crossovers in objective and process, these precursors attempted to address tenacious political questions. Enacted live, and although some were short-lived for their particular cultural climate, their impact is apparent today in our contemporary re-witnessing of a recycled, restructured, and repurposed version of social art.

Pedagogic Participatory Experience

Perspicaciously continuing my quest for more politically motivated art participation, in February 2013, I attended B. Stephen Carpenter's performative-pedagogical approach to collaboration as social justice in Georgia. Intrigued as to the ways in which performance could be participatory, pedagogical, and potentially transformative, I was cautiously curious yet open to this idea. Also receiving an informative email about this event, I had an idea that it was a form of experiential social justice art collaboration. Encouraging intentionality and empathy, Carpenter's public pedagogy works within the creative capacities of collaborators to empower change.

Arriving slightly late, I missed Carpenter's introductory remarks. Unsure whether I missed any pertinent critical information, upon my arrival participants were already engaged in collaboration. As others were working, I talked and asked questions, also watching the processes they were engaging in. Gathering information from watching and discussing with participants, I came to understand that this social endeavor was a way of responding to the global water crisis.

Invoking ideas reminiscent of artist Joseph Beuys' democratic social sculpture whereby education was a primary concern, Carpenter's collaboration was intended to foster social concerns and interests among participants and collaborators. Carpenter's interdisciplinary pedagogy provided collaborators with hands-on means by which they were using indigenous resources and means to create ceramic water filters that provided access to safe drinking water (Carpenter & Muñoz, 2012). As a form of environmental justice, this engagement was intended to bring awareness to the need for safe drinking water for everyone despite economic means.

Mindful of issues surrounding forms of social justice art, I was familiar with the ways in which politically overt activist art risks degrees of intensity and stridency that can hinder the message (Barone, 2008). Although I did not feel this experience was overt political activism per se, I did have concerns about its essentialist collectivity. Aware of degrees of danger in art as a compensatory or communitarian activity, I worried about the ways in which this endeavor assumed that consensus was ideal (Hinderliter, Kaizen, Maimon, Mansoor, and McCormick, 2009; Kwon, 2004). When art lacks authentic political aims, it

becomes a form of social cooperation or collaboration, or a form of governed affability (Bishop, 2004, 2012a).



IMAGE 4.2: *Pedagogy as performance*, 2012, photographic journal

Like Carpenter, I feel that safe drinking water is an important issue, that it should be a basic human right. However, I worried more about the approach in which the project was headed. In this experience, I realized the depth of participation is determined not only by the effort in which a participant puts forth, but also by the complexity of the art itself. In this case, there was a lack of quality relations within critical tensions to act as a stimulus for aesthetic experience. When this is the case, or “In such a cozy situation, art does not

feel the need to defend itself, and it collapses into compensatory (and self-congratulatory) entertainment” (Bishop, 2004, p. 79).

Although I did not consider this experience to be a form of self-congratulatory educative entertainment per se, I did consider the ways in which it could have potentially cultivated more opportunities for aesthetic political participation. Since I feel aspects of unknowing and paradox are vital to the educative process, in what ways can a pedagogic approach to a participatory art be more political? In what ways can participatory art better negotiate the tensions afforded by a political motivation? In what ways can we better encourage pedagogic participatory art engagements to cultivate processes instead of products?

Although I found the hands-on process and message of Carpenter’s pedagogic work to be quite stimulating and informative, this does not imply that the event was unrealized or unsuccessful. Even though I was not transformed as a result of this experience, it was conceivable that it did not resonate with me in that particular moment. As I have detailed in an early chapter, there are innumerable factors that pertain to the ways in which we go about making meaning and interpreting. In this instance, such reasons could have been due to the timing my late arrival—I am often stressed out when I am late, thereby causing me distress—or due to fact that I was cold since the event took place outside in February. I wondered at what point do variables in the conditions of making meaning become less impactful? In what ways might it be possible to enter into an art endeavor, regardless of external factors, and still find opportunities to make meaning?

Like aforementioned Joseph Beuys and B. Stephen Carpenter, artists from Tim Rollins to Lygia Clark, have worked in analogous artist-educator aesthetic pedagogies. Far from a new idea, yet it can be a fertile one. Abundant with questions, I will to explore more of these sentiments later in this inquiry.

Discontentment in Participatory Engagements

Again using aesthetic qualities to help inform my working interpretation of participation in a political aesthetic, I went back in search of participatory prospects. Still faced by challenges in locating local or regional participatory art endeavors, there were two up-coming events that were using language that seemed appropriate and analogous to social and participatory relations. Though I couldn't easily discern whether an opportunity for art participation would be available just by reading about it on the Internet, I decided these endeavors might be worth exploration.

Returning to New York City in March 2013, I was optimistic I would locate some participatory art. Unfortunately, I found disappointment in each of these separate occasions. My first disappointment came while attending artist Nick Cave's variegated performance *Heard-NY* (2013) at Grand Central Terminal, and then also later while attending Park Avenue Armory's sonorous rendition of German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Oktophonie*. Although both experiences were interesting in their own ways I was primarily disappointed in their corollaries as they pertained to this inquiry, which I will now detail.



IMAGE 4.3: *Shift, shift...shake*, 2013, photographic journal

Artist Nick Cave's brief, yet heavily attended *Heard-NY* (2013) at Grand Central Terminal was performative and sculpturally vibrant. This site specific and timed event was comprised of several trained dancers who suited up in beautifully handcrafted, colorful ensembles. Sculpturally crafted to resemble horses, the dressed dancers performed a choreographed performance to the beat of live drums and a harp. Designed to give pause

to our hectic, vivacious world, with no action necessary on the part of the audience, the performance was an observational one.



IMAGE 4.4: *Zoom, pow, zang*, 2013, photographic journal

Similarly, the performance I attended at the Park Avenue Armory was also more passively conceived on behalf of the percipient. This endeavor was a performative rendition of German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Oktophonie*. Performed by an original Stockhausen collaborator, Kathinka Pasveer, this electronic musical score was conducted in a cavernous space where light and sound were intended as part of a sensorial performance. Inspired by Stockhausen's desire for lunar environment, the contextual space was white. Audience members were given white cloaks, asked to take

their shoes off, and were directed to reclined seats arranged on the floor for the duration of the performance.

These experiences, *Heard-NY* (2013) at Grand Central Terminal and Stockhausen's *Oktophonie* at Park Avenue Armory, were not poorly executed or dissatisfactory in any way other than a participative dimension. Since I'd anticipated opportunities for potential participation, it was a desire and goal of mine to participate with contemporary experiences in art. In both of these instances, the art experiences were engaging, yet not politically participatory. Again, relying on the qualities of a political aesthetic, I wanted engagements with contemporary art that were socially oriented, engagements that were predicated on activating me as a participant. In these instances, I either primarily looking or listening, and I began to consider whether my desire to locate participatory experience was taking over my critical faculties. Was I now forcing performance as participatory art? At what point does performance becomes participatory? In what ways had I forcibly conceived these art experiences as participatory when they likely were not intended as such?

In May 2013, also in New York City, I attended French artist JR's *Inside Out* (2012) project in Times Square. Like Tania Bruguera, the Cuban artist from my Tate Modern London experience, I was familiar with his work in advance. I'd seen his TED talk online and knew that JR's works were designed to bring change in the world through art. In this particular experience, the participatory event consisted of standing in a line in New York City's Times Square before having a self-portrait made in a portable photo booth inside a truck.



IMAGE 4.5: *Selfish relations*, 2013, photographic journal

The portrait, which was then instantaneously printed directly from the side of the truck onto a large poster-sized paper, was then immediately, albeit temporarily (due to weather and the intended ephemeral design), pasted in Times Square. Like pieces of a puzzle, portraits of others were affixed alongside those of others. Aiming to transform messages of personal identity into works representative of a larger community identity, while well intended, the objective here was somewhat lost for me. The intentionality behind

JR's event was admirable, but I wondered how I was supposed to be transformed as a result of my engagement in this process. Specifically, since this global art project was concerned with transforming messages of personal identity, I struggled to see the ways in which this was or could have been achieved. I struggled to see the ways in which this process was more than a sensationalized version of an artist-guided selfie.

Unusually enthralling to have your face pasted in an iconic venue like Times Square, as well as online on JR's webpage, for me this was, sadly, the highlight of the event and seemed to also be the case for others. It seemed that many of the participants, myself included, wanted their ten seconds of fame by having their face up in Times Square and online. The project was effective in that it certainly created a lot of media hype and attention, but I was still unconvinced that its aim as a participatory

Regrettably I came away from the experience with little more than when I began. Aside from some nice conversation with a few ladies in line, enduring over three hours of waiting for a photo of yourself that you do not keep left me wanting more from this experience. It left me wanting more from this art experience, or more specifically, it left me wanting a more significant experience with art. I suppose I was hoping this would derive from participating in the endeavor. Although vague and perhaps a bit imprudent, I thought by participating in JR's event, I would arrive at some form of new learning, some sort of transformation.

Unbeknownst the JR event would eat up quite a bit of my time, I was now panicked I wouldn't have much time to experience my next participatory art endeavor. That same day, I had non-refundable, advance purchase tickets to the 2013 Frieze Art Fair New York

on Randall's Island. Notoriously difficult to get to since there is no subway accessibility to or from Randall's Island, I felt it was smart to purchase my combination Frieze Fair bus and ticket in advance. Sitting on a yellow, non air-conditioned school bus for over an hour in Manhattan traffic on a Friday afternoon wasn't desirable but it bought me time to come up with an efficient plan of action for attacking the Frieze Fair before it closed for the day.

Although I'd briefly planned on attending a couple of participatory experiences, I used my guidebook of the Frieze Fair to help me locate them more expeditiously. Unfortunately, due to a later arrival at the Frieze Fair, I'd already missed some of the events for this particular day. With just a couple of short hours before the Frieze Fair closed for the day, I frantically searched for the experience I'd most sought, which was a reenactment of the 1970s New York Soho artist collective *Food*. Since participatory art involves people as the medium of a work, I have found that it can be difficult to identify. In this instance, I followed the guidebook, went to the destination space specified, and looked for groupings of people. Double-checking my guidebook to make sure I was in the right place, I was surprised to find so few people in what I'd anticipated as a potentially robust experience.

What I found upon arriving was a few picnic tables under a large tent with a cooking station where seven people were gathered—some cooking, some eating, and others lingering. Aware that this project was a tribute to a restaurant that opened in 1971 by artists Carol Goodden and Gordon Matta-Clark, along with other artists, I knew that the artist-run space helped to define and transform the artistic life of the 1970s for the Soho region of New York. Even though this event was a reenactment, I was surprised by the lack of dynamism present.



IMAGE 4.6: *Hungry for more*, 2013, photographic journal

Prior to attending, I interpreted this event as potentially having politically motivated participatory relations, but perhaps I should have interpreted it far more literally. Finding less than conviviality, I was frustrated by the lack of vibrancy here. Maybe it was just a restaurant and I'd given it much more credit than was due. Making the best of the limited engagements available, I mustered the confidence to engage with strangers. Dejected and embarrassed, I was met with little conversation in return.

I then attempted to salvage any remaining potential opportunities for social engagement. I went to the cooking station and purchased a salad with cheese, thinking at

the very least those cooking might engage in conversation, yet this was not the case.

Rejected again and uncomfortable, after eating my food I made my way around the Frieze fair dismayed if not slightly confused. I wondered about the ways in which participatory reenactments may be more or less evocative when compared to the original? Were social practice reenactments just forms of generating attention in order to gain attendance? I couldn't help but think that if this was a reenactment of such a lively 1970s art juncture, we were likely doing a disservice to those who left their legacy in our hands.

That same weekend in New York, I attended a few other small art fairs in hopes of shedding any possible light onto my understanding of participatory art engagements. What I saw was more or less a lot of the same—art as a materialized object with performances sprinkled in here and there. Although I enjoy art in a variety of manifestations—objects included—due to the purposes of this inquiry, I was growing in disquietude about finding quality participatory experience. I started to wonder how and why I was coming up with ineffectual experiences.

I began to consider if it was even possible for a political aesthetic to occur in a participatory art experience. Did I put too much stock into these participatory art engagements? Was it possible that perhaps they were not as ubiquitous as they appeared in social media, online, and in other varied forms of scholarship? I wondered if I was forcibly invoking participatory art to be the ultimate, perhaps unattainable, art? In what ways was participatory art so difficult to achieve that it was nearly unachievable? Was participatory art too esoteric for participants and patrons to interpret? What was I missing about these art manifestations?

Questioning Conditions of Participation

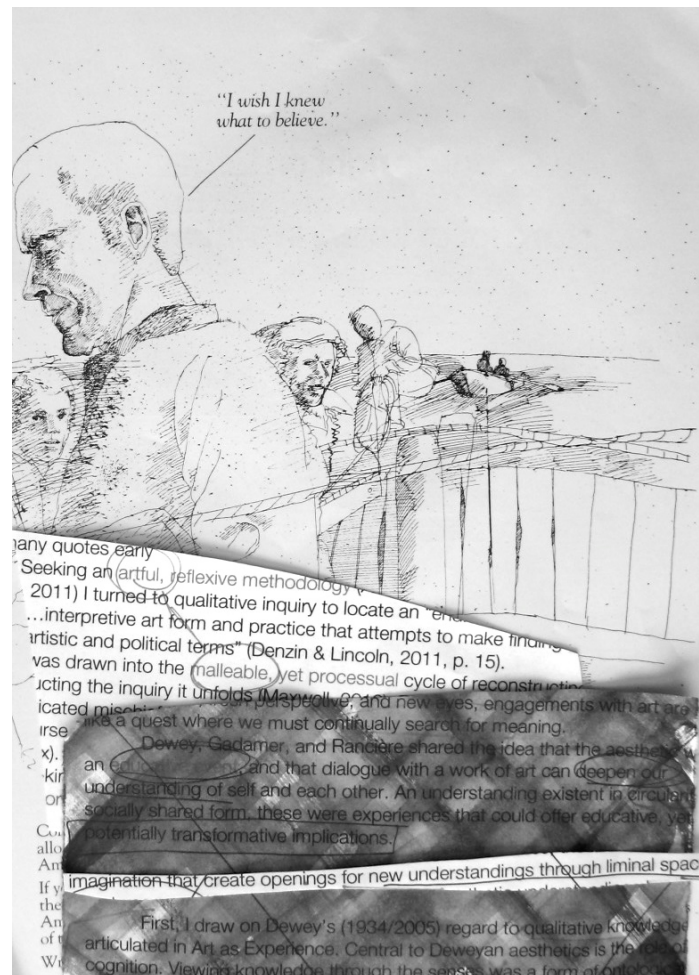


IMAGE 4.7: *I wish I knew what to believe*, 2013, photographic journal

As my frustrations grew, I tried to understand why. In reflecting more about my participatory experiences from the Gutai exhibition to the Frieze Art Fair in New York, I began locating some miscues and mistakes on my behalf. In my preparatory reading and interpretation of these participatory events, I should have been more critical in interpreting understanding buzzwords and grandiose curatorial statements. I needed to better weigh

whether or not the conditions for making meaning were available from the onset of the art endeavor. Enticed by thoughts of transformation, hybridity, public contexts, altered perceptions, and live art, I was easily seduced by key words I associated with participatory experiences. In doing so, I more eagerly categorized them as plausible candidates for this inquiry even if they perhaps were not.

Of course, after the fact one can more easily see how such terms do not carry weight in reference to participation. Performance is not necessarily participation. Although performance and participation in art experience may be closely aligned and often share a similar language, they are not the equivalent. Since I faced such difficulty in locating participatory experiences, I suppose I unintentionally inferred in them what I wanted to. In my desperation to find these endeavors, I forced conceptualizations of experiences that perhaps weren't actually designed to be participatory.

As a result, I learned the hard way, but I do not feel all was lost. I feel my earlier participatory experiences with art were not complete failures, and I locate great learning in them. Although I intended for these participatory instances to put me in places for transformation, I started to wonder if my openness opened me up too democratically. I started fearing I'd wasted time and energy, wondering if this inquiry even warranted research since I seemingly could not find what I was looking for. Though I faced great difficulty over the next several weeks as a result of my ineffectual experiences, I instead tried to think of the ways in which my failure also put me in a position of learning.

Feeling unfulfilled and unresolved I wanted to continue troubling social and participatory art. I wanted to build from my previous experiences in forming a better

interpretation of the discontented one I had. Initially compelled to seek out as many participatory art practices as possible, I felt that one more experience would cyclically supersede the next, and then began questioning if I would ever be satiated. I started fearing that this hermeneutic quest was going to frustrate me into oblivion, at times wondering where and when the unearthing of deeper meaning reaches a place of tolerance or acceptance.

Even though I knew quality experience was valued over quantity in this inquiry, for whatever reason, I felt compelled to search just a bit more for quality opportunities. I wanted to reel in one more big fish. I wanted to net a quality participatory experience and I had a place in mind that might provide an exploratory context for opportunities of understanding.

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stretching meaning

empowered by dissent

yielding us anew

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CHAPTER FIVE:
REEXPERIENCING PARTICIPATION

Deeper Possibilities

In order to subside my anxiety and frustration regarding my participatory art engagements, I was aware of one massive exhibition I could turn to as an additional exploratory context for my inquiry. Capable of lending insight into my discontent, I cast myself out into the seas of Venice. Taking place once every other year, the Venice Biennale exhibits contemporary art continuously for six months. Founded in 1895 and often colloquially referred to as the “Art Olympics,” the Biennale is the oldest and arguably most prestigious international contemporary art exhibition. Knitting together diverse ranges of artists, forms, and practices, the Biennale has long served as an event welcoming radically bold artistic trends and practices of dissimilar natures, so naturally I was curious.

Though I’d never attended the Venice Biennale, I was optimistic that it may present desired learning opportunities. I figured if I could physically get myself to Venice—a major financial challenge—I felt I could then potentially gain more art insight. With each news update or email that came across my screen or into my inbox over a period of weeks, I became inextricably intertwined and compelled to attend the Biennale. Determinedly, I practically stalked airline web fares for weeks looking for affordable airfare. Relentlessly working to create an opportunity for my research, in my late-night desperation I came

upon an affordable, yet extremely last minute opportunity to fly in June 2013. Booking the ticket swiftly, and just twenty-three hours later, I excitedly boarded a plane bound for Italy.

Seated next to me on the plane I found a fellow avid art enthusiast and Venetian. Although she had not yet attended the 2013 Venice Biennale, she excitedly recalled her past experiences. Unbeknownst to me, my friendly seatmate told me that during the Biennale, the rest of city of Venice is also plentiful with art. She warned that even the most well intended of folk can become “art-ed out” by the Biennale’s sheer vastness. Fearing such a prophecy, we crafted a plan to navigate not only the Biennale but also cultural icons and institutions of Venice. Like a friend I felt I’d long known, we chatted about art we enjoy and art that challenges us. She helped me fine-tune my trip to maximize my short week in Venice, also providing local lunch recommendations, and even her phone number in case of emergency. Using her experience to inform my future experience, I felt better prepared for Venice.

Upon arrival in Venice, I felt like I walked straight into a calendar photo. Picturesque from nearly every vantage point, I worked to shake my vacation mindset. Eager to be there for the first time, I checked into my hotel and swiftly traversed the narrow corridors and canals until reaching a 2013 Venice Biennale ticket booth. I purchased a ticket good for the two major venues, Giardini and Arsenale, and placed my spirit of inquiry at the forefront.

Situated in lush gardens, the Giardini is historically home to thirty permanent, national pavilions. Each pavilion has nationally appointed curators and visions, and then there is a separate but nearby exhibition hall, called the Central Pavilion, which houses

thematic work organized by an appointed curator. The Arsenale, put into place in the 1990s, was added to help meet demands of the growing Biennale. Although some countries have pavilions in the Arsenale, they are not permanent structures owned by countries separately as in the Giardini.



IMAGE 5.1: *la Biennale*, 2013, photographic journal

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Swallowed in Giardini's oppressive humidity
 unwittingly walking in circles
 jostling past pockets of conviviality
 within the encyclopedic palace and
 pavilions of historical prominence
 fending off pomposity of
 tautologically referenced clichés
 relating prominence of the
 phantasmagorical into oblivion.

Fatigued form and foggy cognizance
 made no space for unrelenting determination
 ensnarled in emergences of
 understandings alongside
 perceptual slippages
 magnetically pulling yet pushing
 shaking from complacency
 whilst upending certitude
 knitting together vastness in
 nexuses of possibility.

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Appointed curator of the fifty-fifth Venice Biennale, Massimiliano Gioni, created Il Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace), as the 2013 theme of the Venice Biennale. Influenced by Italian-American artist Marino Auriti, who designed an unrealized museum to house the world's knowledge, called it Il Palazzo Enciclopedico, Gioni's curatorial strategy for the Biennale brought to life a temporary vision of an Auriti-inspired museum. Conceiving of the Venice Biennale as a context where objects and visitors are brought together to negotiate the impossible dream of universal knowledge, Gioni encouraged the upending and questioning of knowledge. Intended to cultivate the practice

reexamining our collective and conventional world, Gioni's curatorial influences seemed appropriate for my inquiry.



IMAGE 5.2: *Arsenale*, 2013, photographic journal

Navigating Gioni's Encyclopedic Palace and beyond, I tried to be mindful of the fluid range of aesthetic qualities within a political aesthetic. Since I was inundated with so much art, I deliberately targeted more experiential forms of engagement to inform my understanding of contemporary forms of art with a participatory nature. Although this was a demarcation of sorts, it was a conscious and deliberate one in helping me conceptualize and contextualize on behalf of my inquiry. Since my purpose in conducting research at the Biennale was experiencing art as a live political agent, not passively watching a

performance or looking at a sculpture per se, I felt this was perhaps not desirable but necessary in helping me filter through the massive amount of contemporary art on hand.

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Traversing crowded stone pathways
 Over murky cerulean-sage canals
 Arsenale inconspicuously, nondescriptly
 'round a corner and through the brick façade
 giving way to colossally cavernous spaces
 of antiquated chambers luminously highlighted
 while contextually compartmentalized
 Interweaving works of art
 from varied global points of the earth
 incorporating faculties of sight and sound
 Of scent and vision
 designed not for hearing but listening
 suggestively beckoning increased perception
 in becoming animate and present while
 asking us to give pause to life
 taking time to gestate ideas
 in-between the said and the unsaid.

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Searching for works deploying discordant ranges of temporality and of a more participatory nature, I felt a strange uneasiness. Interestingly, I couldn't help but feel sorry for the art I was so irresponsibly denying due to time constraints and the focus of my inquiry. What new potential insights was I bypassing in order to achieve other new knowledge? What other experience was I eclipsing in narrowing my inquiry to a participation art dimension?

I decided to try to slow down and take as much in as possible. Instead of frantically worrying about what experiential artistic practices were offering, I tried to spend time putting my arms around more. Since I came to Venice for quality experience, I felt I needed to qualitatively treat my experiences with care and compassion. Forcing myself to slow down, to be attuned to what was happening, to acknowledge what was taking place, I worked to disentangle the complex knot in my head from more artistic practices by deliberately giving as many art forms a chance to open to me, as I was open to them. In doing so I invested great time acquiescing myself to these works, waiting for them to engage me, to speak to me. I found that such an effort takes great patience and sincerity.

Participating in Art Experience

From pavilion to pavilion and through the incalculable, nebulous spaces of the 2013 Venice Biennale, I was easily overwhelmed with art. My early attempts in making sense of my experiences of the Venice Biennale were frustrating. Underwhelmed by what appeared to be available participatory experiences, I only encountered two experiences that I believe were intended to be participatory. I use the term “intended” because I was uncertain as to whether or not the artist ultimately sought to create a participatory work. Since these two works most actively used participants as a live agent, I therefore chose to implicate them as participatory.

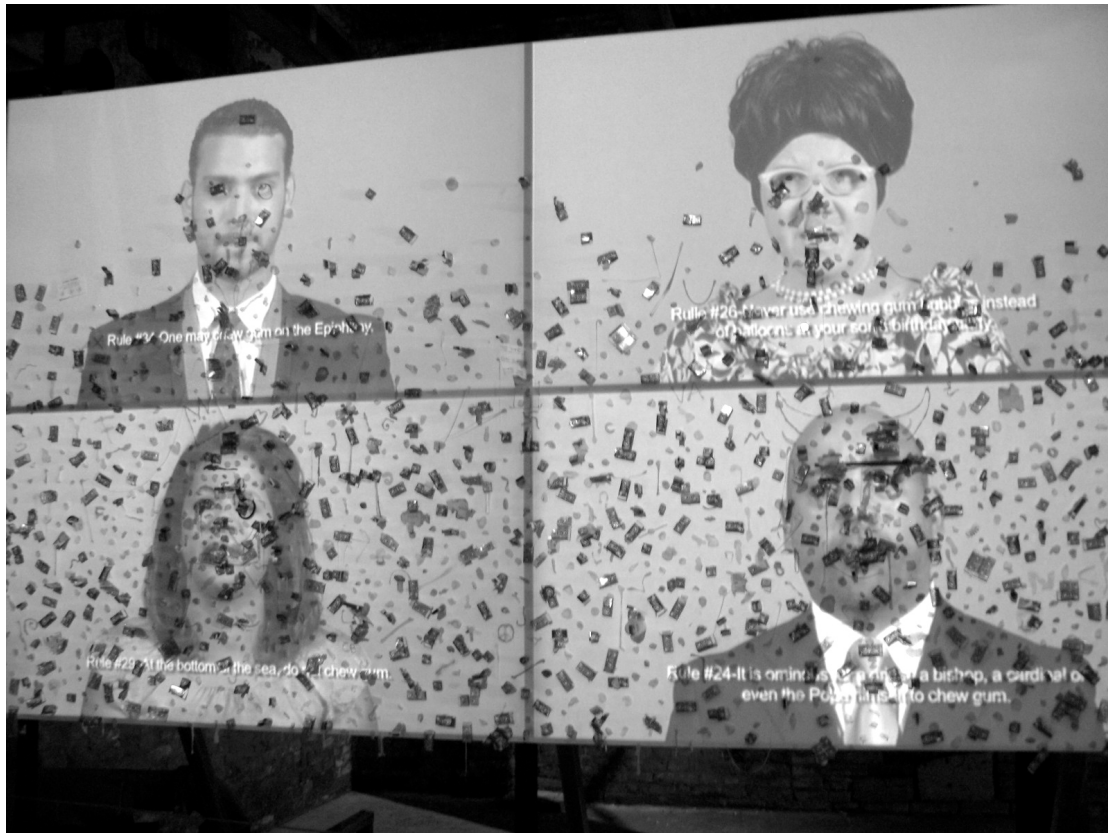


IMAGE 5.3: *Is that gum on your face?*, 2013, photographic journal

The first participatory experience I came upon was at the Latin American pavilion at Arsenale. In this space, I found *ADN, 2012*, by Quintapata, an artist collective from the Dominican Republic. This loquacious video installation entailed four individuals simultaneously outlining the invented rules and protocols of chewing gum. Their sarcastic guidelines dictated and determined social practices for chewing gum. Although unprompted in the video, there was a placard inviting participants to take a piece of provided chewing gum, and after chewing it, place the gum upon the screen where the video was displayed. The video screen became the surface by which participants affixed the gum, gradually accumulating more and more gum throughout the process.

Initially I was eager to participate, but my excitement was quickly met with discontent as I realized that the chewing gum supply was depleted. I found a Biennale exhibition attendant and requested more gum. After chewing and then placing my gum on the wall as directed, I stood there feeling no different other than perhaps a bit more disappointed. I suppose I was waiting for divine conviviality or some grandiose efficacious enlightenment, yet this was not the case.

This experience was ultimately unsatisfying in that my participation here was banal. There was inflexibility in design as the task for participants gave little choice. I suppose there was a choice in where to place the gum on the screen and in selecting the flavor of chewing gum, but for me these choices were not meaningful ones. I felt these simple choices were really insignificant and inconsequential. Since I desired a lively political opportunity, I was unsatisfied as I felt this went largely unrealized.

I found it quite interesting that there were no other participants around me for this experience. I considered that perhaps other participants were apprehensive about engaging in the experience. Although there was evidence that others had previously engaged with the work due to the amount of gum on the screen, I wondered why I was alone. Was it conceivable that people did not recognize the art as a participatory endeavor in the first place? Since the installation was improperly managed with sufficient chewing gum was it possible that people instead disregarded it?



IMAGE 5.4: *ABC gum*, 2013, photographic journal

Issues that pertain to a lack of participants in participatory art are important. In these endeavors, dialectal exchange can become problematic since it is an experiential art that relies on others as the medium. Reminded that, “I can only recognize myself recognized by the other to the extent that this recognition of the other alters me” (Nancy, 2002, p. 64), I was aware of the transformative power of dialectical exchange but was unable to enact it.

Since “reflexivity is incited by an other, so that one person’s discourse leads another person into self-reflection” (Butler, 2005, p. 125), there was only so much reflection I could enact. I comprehend that I am only me with we, yet my interpretations in this experience were missing the voice of another. Needless to say, when you are relying on other participants as interlocutors in a socially mediated art experience, the piece likely falls short if you are the only participant.

I suppose there were innumerable reasons for my solitude, be it the day I attended the Biennale or that potential participants were apprehensive or confused by participating. I wondered in what ways an art experience would be better if it had more collaborators. Without co-participants how can we stretch the boundaries and possibilities of art in solitude? How can we be transformed through dialectical engagement if there are not opportunities for fellowship? In what ways should we encourage participation in these contemporary experiences, or on the other hand, does participatory engagement desire such encouragement?

Related to the notion of available participants, I considered the possibility that this work was just poorly located. This was an ancient, cavernous space filled with numerous tightly arranged art manifestations vying for attention. Perhaps due to the less than desirable location this art was situated in, people inadvertently walked past it. Off to the side and near the back exit, it was ever so slightly in the shadow of a exhibition large wall. Although I obviously saw and ventured to engage with this work, I realized in this experience that contextual placement and proper spacing are concerns worth addressing within such participatory works.

While I recognize there are physical and non-physical conditions of any art experience, for participatory experiences, I feel these conditions may be even more susceptible to temperamental circumstances. Not only are participatory engagements contingent on live human agents, but they are also at the whim of chance occurrences in lighting, timing of participants, management of necessary supplies for the experience, and more. These temperamental circumstances play a vital role in the success or failure of an art experience.

Later at Arsenale, I found Chinese artist He Yunchang's *Seawater of Venice* (2013). Curiously looking at it to try to make sense of it, I found a long series of interconnected tables with bottles arranged on top. The artist numbered and signed small, glass bottles filled with Venetian seawater and invited participants to exchange their own bottle with one of his. In my case, and apparently for others, the bottle was an empty plastic water or soda bottle. There were handwritten instructions for participants that guided us toward two large bins at the end of the tables. These two large bins appeared to be filled with Venice seawater—algae and all. Participants were to fill their bottle with seawater, and in exchange, take a glass bottle from the artists' supply on the table.

Participating in this exchange, I selected a glass bottle as my exchange "souvenir." I saw vague instructions printed on the label suggesting that I email a photo of the glass bottle. Supposing that the artist wanted to see how far the bottles traveled, I decided to participate in this request. Once I returned home a few weeks later I emailed two photos of the bottle. Unfortunately, my email was rejected and returned.

Within this experience it became clear that several people appeared to be unsure about Yunchang's exchange installation. It appeared as though others thought it might be art but they weren't sure so they remained at a safe, observatory distance. Since I had prior experience with participatory art engagements, and I'd read about this experience in the Venice Biennale brochure, I knew it was an art engagement of a temporal nature. As I participated, I saw others awkwardly and curiously watching me. I could tell they were talking about the art, but they chose not to participate.



IMAGE 5.5: *Drinks are on the house*, 2013, photographic journal

I began to consider whether I had been conceiving of participation one-dimensionally. Realizing that the potential for having an experience is not determined by my actual, physical participation, it occurred to me that participation is more than what is immediately perceptible. Since watching and listening are forms of participation, so too is non-participation. In this sense, perhaps I should have reexamined individuals I considered non-participants in art events at the Biennale. I wondered about the potential conversations I likely eclipsed by not engaging them in dialogue about the art.

This experience prompted me to further consider participant apprehension with participatory experience. I recalled hearing artist Martha Rosler describe similar audience apprehension in response to some of her more interventionist, experiential works. Speaking at the College Art Association conference in New York in 2012, Rosler discussed the politics of seeing and spectatorship, outlining challenges for works of animate art. She discussed the entangled feelings of shock and nascency that viewers undergo in experiencing challenging or novel art endeavors. Articulating how we are more accustomed to looking at art, Rosler conveyed that people often don't understand the messiness of live art; they don't know how, when, or where to participate appropriately.

I have seen first hand what Rosler described, and in my experiences many people from New York to London to Venice, do not fully understand the ways in which we engage in live art. Although Rosler was discussing art within institutional confines, such as art museums, I believe her points are valid in bringing awareness to the assertion that we may need to consider the ways in which we engage with live art more broadly. For me, this not only includes institutional spaces but more non-traditional locales, such as art fairs,

biennales, and other public contexts. I wondered in what ways are we a well-behaved public afraid to engage in art experience because it doesn't resemble art we are more accustomed to? How can we better create and invite multiple, open points of entry for participatory art without losing relevant and significant opportunities for meaning making?



IMAGE 5.6: *Whatcha got in that bottle?*, 2013, photographic journal

Within Yunchang's exchange installation, I believe that participant apprehension was related to the inflexibility and poor design of the work. The vague, if not amateurish contextual design of the experience appeared to confuse many people. Although acceptable for art to be outdoors, this could have raised confusion for people if they are

more accustomed to art experience indoors. More importantly, however, there was a sign telling people how to participate in the experience. Hand written on a poster, these instructions were written in awkwardly composed English by a Chinese artist at an Italian exhibition. I would venture to guess that I was not the only participant that faced difficulty in interpreting what these vague instructions were trying to convey.

Furthermore, I perceived these written instructions to potentially be after-thought by the artist. Since they weren't printed or professionally situated alongside an official Venice Biennale placard, it seemed that the artist decided, yet at the last minute, to help make this experience clearer for participants by using words. Within these explicit instructions, there was only so much deviation possible for participants. I couldn't help but think that if instructions are so vital to explaining the work, perhaps the work itself needs rethinking. Simple or even a lack of instructions is perhaps the most rewarding kinds as authorship is left for the participant. I wondered to what extent are instructions necessary or desired in participatory art experiences. In what ways can experience be more evocative in participatory art without instructions?

Like Qunitapata's work, there was little choice in the matter for participants to autonomously and politically act, and yet again, this experience was ultimately unsatisfying in that my participation here was banal. While I certainly appreciated the participatory gestures in both of these manifestations, I felt these experiences were a bit contrived. I feel that when art is contrived it cannot eschew banality, and yet when art is without contradiction it affirms and confirms through insipid, predictable outcomes.



IMAGE 5.7: *Mixing ideas*, 2013, sketch

Art produces unlimited ranges of readings and interpretations, yet here there was restriction. There was little space for transformation—these experiences lacked enticement, they lacked unsettling qualities in order to move me see or think otherwise. I felt these experiences were more of an “activated spectatorship” (Bishop, 2004, p. 78). Although it was an activation of viewer, for me the experience was less concerned with participation.

For me, participation has attributes of sharing and partaking in something; it allows members to take part, to play an active role. I felt my role in the participatory experience was inconsequential—it didn’t really matter if I was there or not. I realized that activation of

a viewer is not sufficient—the work must be political in nature if it was going to provoke me to think differently, to act differently. I needed political implications in order to produce a salient experience.

Participation and Beyond

Works of contemporary art participation are an extension of installation art (Bishop, 2004). For this reason, I will discuss one example of an installation that approached a participatory experience. Although it was without social discourse, it was heavily imbued with other aesthetic sensitivities that shifted my thinking in rethinking this experience as it pertained to participation. In this experience I was reminded just how much my senses impacted interpretation with a work of art.

Also at the Latin American pavilion at Arsenale, I was engulfed by an intoxicating, unexpected aromatic sensation. Initially confused by this powerful smell, I couldn't quite figure out where was it coming from. It had a particular smell that was unlike anything else I'd detected, yet paradoxically seemed slightly familiar. Walking around the exhibition space, I assumed that this smell was just by happenstance.

After taking a closer look at an installation by Bolivian artist Sonia Falcone, I discovered that the powerful aromatic sensation came from her installation *Campo de Color* (*Color Field*). Struck by the beauty of its color, I initially overlooked the possibility that the swirling of fragrance was emitted from this work. While I'd seen vessels filled with pigments from a distance, I didn't realize they were spices until I was much closer. Perceptually synergetic and vibrant in color and scent, spices from cayenne to turmeric to cocoa and beyond filled the air. These spices explained why the smells were similar and

yet still foreign. Identifiable individually, the spices together took upon a new creation of scent unlike any other. Relying not only on my eyes to see but also on my nose to smell, it was a way of making meaning beyond looking.



IMAGE 5.8: *Powerful stuff*, 2013, photographic journal

Intended to be sensory, I was not distraught or frustrated by the lack of political participation in this manifestation. Although it was an experience that necessitated heightened phenomenological perception, it was not a participatory experience for me in the sense that I have been examining for this inquiry. Again looking for art engagements

that are politically imbued, I desired endeavors that forced me to move from a more passive role and into a participatory one. Since Falcone's installation forcibly invoked a participatory response (i.e., I didn't have a choice in smelling) and lacked dialectical opportunities, I felt that my involvement was somewhat superfluous in bringing the experience to life. Discerning little difference between the act of smelling these spices and smelling a funnel cake at the county fair, I felt that my participation was inconsequential. Although this was a relevant experience among the many I encountered at the Venice Biennale, at the time I didn't feel it was a participatory experience.

I came across several other close calls but they were not quite participatory either. Polish artist Artur Zmijewski exhibited a video of a participatory experience. On a TV screen in the exhibition area, viewers were able to watch Zmijewski's participatory event, yet we were not able to take part physically. Although the work seemed to contain every potential characteristic of a quality political aesthetic, it was difficult to fully discern without participating in the experience personally. In this sense, I certainly felt that the work likely did not have the same impact for me as a viewer as it did for those actively involved at the time of filming.

Bishop (2012a, 2012b) has written at length about the ways in which similar artists assign performative roles to others for their works. Bishop, as well as others (e.g., Finkelpearl, 2013), have also written about the implications pertaining to labor, especially as it relates to those overlooked as co-creators as participants. Contending that such forms of labor is a way of outsourcing authenticity, Bishop (2012b) described delegated performance as "hiring nonprofessionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job

of being present and performing at a particular time and particular place on behalf of the artist, and following his or her instructions” (p. 91). She outlined three different variations of this practice—outsourcing of non-professionals, professionals from areas of expertise, and situations where performers are hired for film or video since the situations are too challenging to reproduce or repeat.

Encountering the latter in Zmijewski’s video, I encountered what I assumed to be the outsourcing of non-professionals in Russia’s pavilion at the Giardini, then the hiring of what I assumed to be professionals from areas of expertise in the Romanian pavilion, which was also at the Giardini. Artist Tino Seghal’s performance, which was awarded the top Biennale prize, a Golden Lion, was also hired professionals from areas of expertise. Having experienced similar Seghal endeavors before, my heart sank a bit when I saw this one in Venice. His performance, like the other examples of delegated performance at the Venice Biennale, left me indifferent. I could not help but feel alienated and cold as a viewer. Sure, some of these works were more compellingly achieved than others, but they didn’t transform me in any way, and this was frustrating.

I felt it necessary to discuss these delegated works as they pertain to participation in art because I feel there is a close, if not confusing blurring of boundaries with the use of live human subjects. In these instances, the work was a live performance, and like participatory art, it is devoid of an artist as a creator/performer. Even though performers of varying affiliations perform the work, the viewer isn’t necessarily called into action as a co-participant as they would be in a participatory experience. Again, this was part of what I wanted to experience in art of a social or performative nature: political participation.



IMAGE 5.9: *It's Tino time*, 2013, photographic journal

Since I perceive delegated performances to be akin to participatory art, I started to wonder why there were more delegated performances over participatory ones at the Venice Biennale. Acknowledging the complexities in participatory art, I realize it is likelier difficult to achieve. Additionally, understanding that the live human subject drives excitement, I acknowledge that the potential repeatability of performance makes it a more viable form not only to reenact but also to market to museums. Simply put, delegated

performances are easier to realize, repeat, and profit from in comparison to a participatory manifestation.

I started to consider the ways in which delegated performances might be ways of bringing us one step closer to participatory forms of art. I wondered if it was bringing art closer to a lived experience or just doing the same thing differently? Was there a discernable difference between delegated performance and experience with more conventional forms of art, such as painting? Even though politics are present by implication of the liveness in delegated performance, they were not, in my opinion, forms of a political aesthetic, nor were they participatory art.

Understanding Challenges of Participation in Art

In reexamining my experiences at the Venice Biennale, I realized just how few experiences were participatory in the sense that I'd come to understand. Initially dumbfounded by experiences I expected yet did not encounter, I was baffled. Malcontented that this worldwide contemporary art showcase had so few of these participatory practices that were seemingly ubiquitous, I wondered if I had misunderstood these artistic practices? Why was I unable to locate artistic forms of practice that endowed me with experience as a participant?

Frustrated that I'd spent a lot of time, effort, and money into travelling to Venice for my research, I wanted to find validation of art as a participatory experience alive. I envisioned Venice swelling with innumerable occasions for eager participants to engage in artistic manifestations of all sorts. I suppose this vision also carried with it my eagerness in wanting to be on the cusp of what art was doing in our contemporaneous moment.

Perhaps I wanted to be a part of the next happening avant-garde or the next great “ism” in art, and without its convincing presence in Venice, I had no indication of the sort. Apparent that I’d come to Venice expecting and projecting, I was dismayed. I went back to doing what I do best—asking questions.



IMAGE 5.10: *de/reconstructing*, 2013, mixed media

I was chagrined as I felt I did everything possible in providing the conditions for meaning making to occur in particularly compelling ways. I felt I was aware of any

aesthetic qualities or conditions to cultivate opportunities for meaningful experience. Was I over thinking participation as art? In what ways can knowledge possibly inhibit aesthetic experiences? I wondered if I should fault the ill-conceived art experience of the artist? Should I fault the co-participants? Should I fault myself?

I wondered about the ways in which I'd potentially too closely read about a political aesthetic through my intellectual mother and father, Claire Bishop and Jacques Rancière, respectively? In what ways should I have better questioned theories of participatory art? In what ways did I perhaps place too much emphasis on the political motivations of participatory art? I began to consider if I was back to defining art and aesthetics too narrowly. Fearing that I inadvertently crafted a supremely elitist approach to art, I reconsidered the ways I may need to reopen and unbind myself.

While there are indeed many problems and challenges in works of art with a willfully unstable identity (Bishop, 2004), I was not prepared for the challenges and problems in receiving them. I have discussed many of the problems encountered above. What I perceive to be the biggest problem of them all, however, pertains to inconsistencies in qualities of conditions for participatory art. I suppose this should not surprise me, as there is a lack of quality in many forms of art. Although you cannot account for the lack of quality in participatory art, just as you cannot account for a quality in any other art, many questions still pertain to the ways in which we can better create the conditions of participatory endeavors so that meaning making can better occur. In what ways can we better analyze the qualities of conditions art of a participatory nature since they are inherently different than more visual ones?

Experiencing Percipience

When I recall my experiences at the Biennale, I most vividly remember the sheer voracity of aesthetic sensibilities I encountered while experiencing art. Encountering works that relied on smelling, hearing, seeing, feeling, and tasting, it seemed that the Biennale was oft navigated by sensory experiences of all kinds. While these are forms of participation, they are not participatory in this sense that I was anticipating for this inquiry, as they more heavily relied on a social, discursive implication.

I found these sensory experiences to be particularly compelling because it was among the first of times where I can remember percipience on so many levels informing my understanding of art in a multimodal fashion. These forms of percipience informed fruitfulness or richness for me while the participatory art experiences were not the involvements or memories that persist most vibrantly today.

One of the most impactful encounters I experienced was sound art. Exposed to a complicated resonance of sound by Polish artist Konrad Smolénski, his work *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (2013) spoke quite passionately to me. Near the end of my Venice Biennale experience, Smolénski's endeavor was a timed event that took place at the top of the hour for every hour in the Giardini. Waiting with anticipation, there was a small gathering of people eager to explore what this could offer them. I suppose the supplied earplugs should have been my first indicator that this would be powerful experience, but I was even more surprised to find out just how it would unfold.



IMAGE 5.11: *Is that art I hear?*, 2013, photographic journal

The stark contextual space was less than inspiring, yet soon this undisturbed quality would dissipate as two large, hand-made iron bells began slightly swinging in parallel motion. Gradually moving faster, the bells began to produce sound as the gong inside of the bell made contact with the sides. Connected to a row of speakers, the noise from the bells was broadcasted through rows of broadband speakers that echoed across the two opposing walls. In short, this created an echoing system and within this small space, the noise soon became startling.

The sonorous reverberations were shocking—filling and vibrating my entire body. The noise was so maddeningly loud you could nearly feel it permeate your soul. With waves of vibration and momentous base working around and yet inside of your body, in a phenomenological sense, you could participate bodily. Although there were no live participants enacting this experience as it was all done mechanically, it was certainly an evocative sensation.

I, as well as a hand full of others, savored the entire experience. I was sad to hear the vibratory sensations fade back out into silence. It was compelling in that I endeavored to think with this experience—I watched, I wondered, I felt, I moved, and I gained fresh insights. Strikingly poignant, I felt it was an aesthetic worth experiencing again and again, and upon exiting the Polish pavilion, I made sure to encourage other curiously apprehensive observers to give it a try. I felt compelled to talk to others about it, to convey my excitement with this experience much in the same way the girl did for me in London with *Surplus Value* (2012). I suppose I wanted others to experience where art could take them, as it just did for me.

Before leaving the Venice Biennale for the last time, it seemed I finally found reassurance that my time in Venice for purposes of my inquiry was not a waste. Although I came to better understand contemporary forms of participatory art, I also came to see how art experiences could take upon participatory qualities, albeit ones different from how I'd been interpreting for this inquiry. I realized that a work of art does not have to declare itself as participatory or otherwise, if it has an inherent political aesthetic the work itself has

aesthetic qualities. In this moment, I realized that maybe I was still bound to my bias—that I was still demarcating and defining art. I was shifted but I was not transformed.

.....

indelible art

precisely at that moment

never quite again

.....

CHAPTER SIX:
INTERPRETING EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPATION

Deconstructing Prevailing Frustrations

Interpretation is an inescapable aspect of human behavior (Gadamer, 1960/2004), yet enacting understanding takes time to gestate, and hermeneutically, the quest for meaning must be unearthed. Concomitant and intertwined, analysis and interpretation occur in tandem conjunction (Chang, 2008). As I experienced participatory art, I underwent analysis of my data as it was processually collected and interpreted. I desired to better understand social and participatory relations in art, and also what educative prospects may be imparted from them.

This autoethnographic narrative inquiry began with the following research questions:

3. In what ways might engaging in contemporary artistic forms of participatory practice foster new understandings?
4. How might analysis of my experiences with contemporary artistic forms of participatory practice inform art education and aesthetic education?

In reexamining and deconstructing my participatory experiences with contemporary art, the data revealed several insights and naturalistic generalizations (Creswell, 2013) to these questions, among them: interference of bias and questioning disjuncture theories in practical application.

Interference of Bias

A hermeneutic analysis comes with a deconstruction of bias. In critically appraising my contemporary participatory art experiences, it became increasingly apparent just how much frustration was prevalent. My former interpretations of participatory art, as well as my latter ones, were steadfastly vexing. Although I have suggested how I prefer art that is a source of contention, as I faced it innumerable times over in this inquiry, questions still permeate.

While I still believe that art can serve as an emboldening and evocative form of wide-awakeness (Greene, 1995; 2001), that it can be a way of shifting us in our everyday life, I did not find this to be the case in the participatory art endeavors I encountered. Some the participatory art endeavors I experienced were more impactful than others, but many times over there were experiences that I did not recognize as participatory art when they were staring me in the face. Only later in analyzing and interpreting my experiences I did realize they were participatory. Subsequently, and as strange as this may come across, I never fully realized my role a participant.

In reflecting back across my experiences, I realized just how much I was primarily documenting, watching, or looking *at* the art experiences, not necessarily engaging or participating *with* them. In other words, I talked about participatory art as an object; yet fell short in actually participating. Even though I set out to be a participant in these contemporary art endeavors, to live the experiences first-hand, I was unable to get to a point where I actually *became* a participant in the art engagements.

Of course, at the time, I thought I was participating, but in re-reading my notes and memos of those endeavors, it became apparent that I was largely in an observatory role. Although looking could be conceived as a form of participation, for the purposes of this inquiry, I was aiming to participate more politically in order to possibly educe change. Moreover, I was trying to move from a passive position into one of political intentionality, one where I could be disturbed from my everyday life. In this sense, looking was not necessarily the desired form of participation I initially anticipated for these participatory endeavors.



IMAGE 6.1: *Percipient in position*, 2013, photographic journal

Missing the point of actual participation by remaining at a distance, I do not feel my lack of political participation was intentional, however. I believe that my bias about art interfered and contributed to my miscues in realizing participation. As I detailed earlier in this inquiry, I have struggled to come to terms with art as anything other than an object of our material culture. Art as an idea or action that promises to educe social change, such as contemporary forms of social practice, have been problematic for me.

Art as an artifact produced by someone for someone was a prejudice I thought I had moved beyond—I thought I had come to terms in understanding that art is realized experientially (Dewey, 1934/2005). Although I theoretically understand how art manifests *dematerialized* (Lippard, 1973/1997), I suppose I was unable to move this understanding into matters of practical application. Cultivating a negligence and naïveté that not only privileged but also perpetuated the prominence of art's materiality, I believe my narrow views and bias hindered me from interpreting and then experiencing art in a participative manner.

Through my data analysis and interpretation, I became aware of just how much my elitism and prejudice about art was still lingering. Akin to the ways in which I would engage with a more static form of art (i.e., a painting), I was treating contemporary art endeavors as little more than another static form of art. In doing so, I was working at the very minimum of what a participant could do—I was looking. In this sense, I was thinking of art as a static object, albeit one of a fluid meaning, and I was treating myself as a static

percipient, albeit one of a fluid meaning, and this was problematic for me in moving me to understand participatory art as a participant.

I felt this to be the case a few times but one in particular was Tania Bruguera's *Surplus Value* (2012) at Tate Modern. In that particular instance, since I was still new to participatory art. In analyzing my detailed research notes, it became apparent that I was more focused on better understanding how a social art engagement might unfold rather than trying to participate in it. I wondered if this was due to my novice experience with participatory engagements or if this was the case for others. Since I inadvertently practiced a similar behavior in B. Steven Carpenter's pedagogic performance, as well as *Inside Out* (2012) project, I figured this was a personal issue.

With a culturally rich arts upbringing by parents, as well as educators who valued and were also educated in the arts, my prejudice in this inquiry was just as apparent as it was embarrassing. My old habits were there all along, and through reflexivity I was reminded of how they impacted my experiences with participatory art. At the time I was engaged in participatory art experiences, I did not perceive my bias interfering with opportunities of participation in art. However, in picking apart and pulling back the layers in order to make sense of this inquiry, I came to see how my inability to get beyond myself hindered potential growth.

Realizing that one of the most prevalent sources of frustration for me throughout these experiences was ironically me, I began to wonder about the ways in which we can escape our own entrapment in order to move forward. If my inability to see beyond these deeply entrenched expectations and prejudices potentially hindered salient understanding

for the purposes of this inquiry, wouldn't this also be problematic for others? If I made such critical errors, wouldn't others also potentially make similar mistakes where bias overtly interferes or takes over?

I began to consider the openness of experience, as well as openness of a participant. In what ways can we enter into spaces of life, be they art experiences or otherwise, completely open? How could I really get myself to participate in participatory art endeavors? How could I actually bring myself to experience art as a social, live engagement? How do we move ourselves from contentment or passivity?

Maybe I still clandestinely wanted to define art, since I constantly found myself back attempting to treat it like an object. I wondered if I had a potential, yet inadvertent desire to demarcate, to draw lines around things in life. I wondered if it was possible to surmount desires to delineate or was such an act an inescapable, natural human propensity? In what ways can we better subside our interference with bias?

Questioning Disjunctive Theories in Practical Application

I began considering the notion that perhaps I wasn't the only culpable source. Lind (2012) stated that, "It is obvious that not all social practice projects are interesting and relevant, just as all painting is not uninteresting and irrelevant" (p. 52). I echo this sentiment as I, too, encountered socially engaged endeavors that were not all scrupulously conceived. Considering the idea that perhaps the participatory art experiences I came across were ill conceived, I wondered if it was possible that the participatory instances I came across were more limiting in what they could apprise.

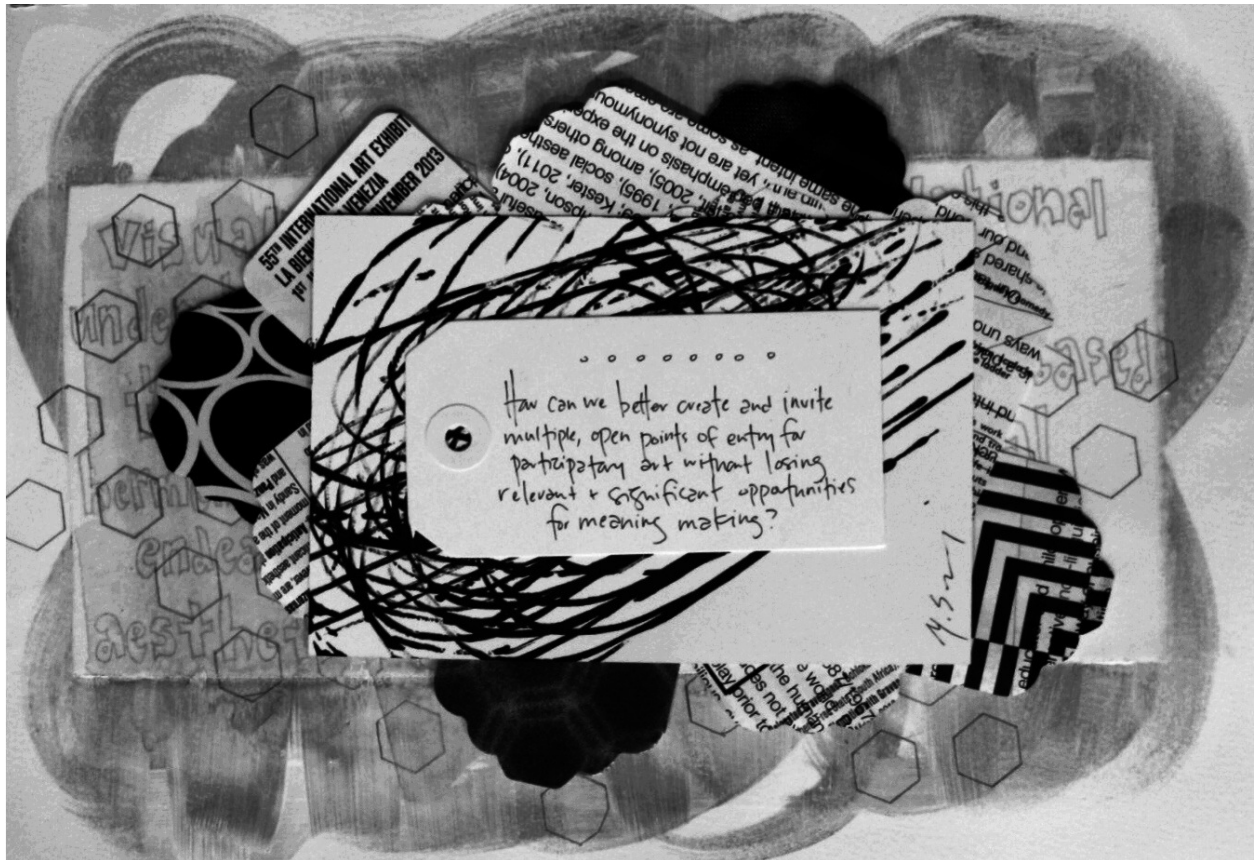


IMAGE 6.2: *Artistic interpretation*, 2013, mixed media

While less concerned with assessing participatory art, as I perceive such an act to be essentially unnecessary since doing so reaffirms and reproduces boundaries, I did consider how the quality of a participatory art design might be impactful. At what point does participatory art work successfully? What conditions may cultivate ways in which we can think more politically through participation? How much participation sufficiently lends insight?

Participatory art is contingent on participants enacting an idea or action as a work of art. In reviewing my notes and reflections of my participatory art experiences, I saw that I initially failed to consider these variables. This prompted me to further reexamine

fundamental notions of participatory art. Where did I receive information about participatory art?

Identifying a disjuncture between theory and practice, I noticed that many of my early definitions and interpretations primarily derived from literature, yet were not always present in my data. I wondered about the ways in which I should have been more critical of literature as it pertained to social and participatory practices in contemporary art. Perhaps I needed to better and more thoroughly question where knowledge comes from since many times in my writing I made grand assumptions and I spoke with authority that was not mine to declare.

Just as I acknowledge my interpretations of participatory art is one among others in the world, I needed to remember that knowledge imparted by others is just one interpretation as well. Since these are emerging practices in art, I needed to remind myself that these are also emerging interpretations. I should have more diligently worked to question scholars writing about social and participatory art, as well as the varied media outlets, from museums to artists, which disseminated information. Our social world is inundated so frequently with information, yet such forms of knowledge are not all imparted with care and concern.

Through I have not yet experienced participatory art endeavors widely enough; this work necessitates further persistency and investment of on-site participatory experiences. Social and participatory art relations are something I will continue to examine, as they demand from us further considerations. What I have begun to glean from my experience is that there are many gaps in understanding social art practice, and I feel that potential

educative opportunities are adrift without a consideration of social and participatory art corollaries.

Most apparently missing in the literature are examples of those who have been or were changed by engaging in social or participatory art practices. There are many critics, yet fewer in the trenches living with participatory experiences in order to understand. In what ways have scholars who have also written about participatory art been transformed? Why was I unable to locate any other narrative inquiries about participatory art in literature?

Entering into this inquiry, I communicated how I envisioned participation as an act that goes beyond that of just action or partaking; I envisioned it politically. Furthermore, I also communicated how I perceive participation also encompassing forms of non-participation—that the negation of activity, as in the sense of nonparticipation, is a form of participation. Not participating is a choice to decline involvement, yet is also a form of partaking.

Just as there are varying forms and degrees of participation in life, there are variations of participation in art. In unpacking the conditions of participation, I came to see that a key determinant in participation is that it takes many shapes; it crafts itself more corporeally than I'd envisioned. While still political, participation is also a sensory form of activation. From smelling to touching and beyond, bolstered by reflexivity of participatory art experiences, I was reminded of the embodied, non-discursive components of participation.

I initially failed to acknowledge the ways in which participation included sensing as a form of participation. Although I discussed embodiment as it pertained to my theoretical

framework and aesthetic qualities, I never explicitly connected it to participation. Many times over in my contemporary art experiences for this inquiry, I participated by using my senses. I noted this sensorial treatment in my detailed description of Sonia Falcone's *Campo de Color* (2013), as well as Konrad Smolénski's *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (2013), among others.

Viewing this as an initial oversight, I now understand that participation extends as a form of corporeal engagement. This prompted me to consider the role affect plays in participatory art. Since how things make us feel is different than how things make us think, I thought about the ways that perhaps affect should be further considered. Devoid in my review of literature, I wondered about the ways affect pertains to social and participatory art engagement. How can a participatory art design more compellingly connect to us when the project is more meaningful?

Participants have varying degrees of control, and partaking in participative action may glean meaningful outcomes or even potential transformation for some, yet not for all. Participation is implicit on some degree of participant activity, yet to what degree is determined by the percipient. The paradox of participation is that if we all become nonparticipants, then the work ceases to exist by becoming nonfunctional.

As I detailed, I was often the sole participant present for an art experience, and subsequently felt that a politicized form of participation was ineffectually realized due to lack of participants present. Without co-participants, participatory art ceases to be fully realized so I wondered why others weren't engaging, or better yet, what could encourage others to participate. Since arts participation takes place widely—from the home, to

community, to museum, to parks, and beyond, these solitary experiences prompted me to further think about the ways in which the context factors into social art engagements.

Gadamer (1960/2004) critiqued the limitations of museums and institutions, positing that they were inauthentic as they removed art from lived experience. Since participatory art tries to imbricate art and living, perhaps I should have tried to explore it more openly outside of the confines of an institutional structure as most of my interactions with participatory art occurred within institutional organizations. Art does not always derive from the codified art world, so I wondered what impact context has on participatory and social practices in contemporary art? In what ways might participatory art better thrive in alternative, non-codified sites, such as those outside of formally established contexts?

Conversely, if museums and institutions are to continue exploring relationships of social practice, in what ways might participatory art better engage or increase the participation of participants? How can institutions begin to explore virtual or digital forms of engagement for social art practices? How can participatory art utilize technologies for participatory art?

Participatory art is complex and contested, and it may necessitate more guidance, though not necessarily expertise. Education may be necessary to help guide us in better understanding participatory art as education can help bridge the gaps and confusion about these still emerging social practices. Perhaps we need new approaches to teaching and learning at all levels in order to better understand forms of social art engagement.

Since participation is central to life, learning, and education, in what ways can we teach as a participatory art form? What new forms of pedagogy may be necessary or

helpful in driving increased understanding of participatory art? What might be achieved when participation is given a central role in art? In what ways can we encourage the process or act of learning to become more important than the product?

I feel that the enactment of educative understanding first begins with the self. Apparent that my conventions were tested on many levels and in many different ways, this inquiry was full of tension. In reflexively looking at my experiences, I was open to the notion that participatory art could change me. For months, I believed transformation did occur; yet in analyzing and deconstructing the data, I was inclined to further question why I thought this was possible.

Excited by new prospects in art, I desired heterogeneous spaces and dissensus, I wanted to collectively engage in the co-production of a participatory work alongside others, but through extensive analysis and interpretation of the data, I perceive no evidentiary justification of transformation. Participatory art did not change me, and these incipient relations remain inchoate. While I came to see the ways in which participatory art could activate me in a social endeavor, participatory art never quite disturbed my everyday life so much so that I was altered. Rather, I have begun to consider whether or not transformation is achievable. Is it enough for participatory art to subtly shift consciousness? In what ways does participatory art need to be transformative?

Participation may increase the absorption of knowledge in experience, but it does not always carry the promise of transformation. In a sense, we may conceive of experience as a form of nourishment and participation as a means by which we go about better absorbing its benefits, but participation does not signify or guarantee meaningful

consequence. I do feel that when participatory art carries a political consequence, it may lend more transformative, salient experiences but, again, this cannot be guaranteed. I have tried to highlight the ways in which social and participatory art practices raise many compelling questions, and often, these questions arise only after experiences are enacted upon. For this reason, this is why we need fewer echo chambers and more participants experientially engaging in dialogue.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

Participation in Art Education and Aesthetic Education

Long before contemporary discussions were centered on participatory and social orientations of art, Dewey (1934/2005) argued that art was realized experientially. He also discussed the ways in which art was stripped of the lived experience foretelling, “As long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization, neither art nor civilization is secure” (p. 357-358). Dewey sought for art to be sentient. He advocated for the imbrication of art and living, for art to be realized as a living manifestation. I have come to better acknowledge the ways in which Dewey’s points are applicable.

My own experiences with art have begun to illustrate the need for, and the ways in which art’s strength moves beyond the sacralization of relations of commodities as spectacle (Debord, 1967/1983). Concomitantly through my participatory experiences and review of literature, I have come closer to interpreting how art goes deeper than the naïve master narrative that is primarily interested in valorizations of object-based forms of art as reliquaries of taste and beauty. Art is more than representations of beauty, more than what we make, display, or perform. Art is much greater than a “possession of aesthetic culture” (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 85); it carries broader life significance.

One aim of this inquiry was to explore the ways in which participatory, contemporary forms of art may be educative. More specifically, I wanted to explore how

my contemporary artistic forms of participatory practice might inform art education and aesthetic education. As I have detailed in earlier chapters, I conceived of participatory art as a form of political aesthetic. Since participatory art resists definition as it is perpetually shifting and porous, I worked to locate participatory art not so much in name, but rather in feeling, in motivation, and in quality.

I developed a fluid framework, or aesthetic qualities, through which I could begin to think of art in experience as it pertained to our living. Deriving primarily from my literature, I identified these qualities as ethical, political, relational, and social in nature. Mindful of these aesthetic qualities as I encountered participatory art, in analyzing and interpreting my experiences, I now perceive these qualities differently. While I still believe aesthetic qualities hold relevancy, my perception of them in actuality has shifted somewhat.

As I detailed in my analysis, there were many contemporary forms of participatory art where I felt compelled to demarcate the art as participatory or not participatory. Even though I knew aesthetic qualities were a range, or guide, I still continued to inadvertently define the art based on whether the aesthetic qualities were evident or not evident. I use the term evident carefully, because although I may not have encountered a particular aesthetic quality in my experience, I understand that it could have been manifest for another person. However, quite often aesthetic qualities are imperceptible to the eye.

For example, in Quintapata's participatory gum experience, there was evidence that others before me participated in the art endeavor, as demonstrated by the amount of gum on the screen. However, for my particular experience, since I was the only participant present, and although I could participate through many of the aesthetic qualities, the

dialectical qualities were missing. Not evident was the dialectical engagement, and therefore, I considered this endeavor a disappointment since sufficient participation in it for was devoid.

Unfortunately, I now see how irrational my judgment was. At the time, if an aesthetic quality was not present for my encounter, I was quick to judge it as non-participatory. Instead of focusing on what an experience had, I looked for what it lacked, and subsequently casting it aside. Again, my inability to go beyond myself hindered me.



IMAGE 7.1: *Participating among others*, 2013, photographic journal

Reflecting back on this instance, as well as the other participatory art endeavors, I was reminded of the ways education may be beneficial in helping inform understanding more comprehensively and more broadly. Although this inquiry was designed around a social orientation in art, I now interpret such endeavors more experientially and broadly. Through experience and participation, I have come to better understand how engagements with art as living are educative.

Education is, in part, a socially engaged process with others (Vygotsky, 1978), and like art, is an interpretive process layered in meaning. The crux of education lies in cultivating a society of creative, critical thinkers who are aesthetically conscious, those who can adapt to the unrest in the world around them, and recognize potential opportunities to recraft themselves through social conditions. Although many times over in this inquiry I did not practice such comprehensions, I am still working to realize these potentials for myself.

The education of art and aesthetics is about learning, thinking, and experiencing for our living; it provides a means of developing aesthetic consciousness for living (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2013). Educatively, art is a lived plan of action (Gradle, 2007), and the participatory experiences in it may cultivate rich understanding for living. We may impart from participatory art the use of consequential and political participation in pedagogy. Meaningful, political participation increases the absorption of information; it drives understanding. In other words, when using participation politically in educative contexts, knowledge is more appropriately immersed as the pedagogue is afforded consequential and localized, personal forms of learning that influences living.

Since art dwells as an animate form of aesthetic, in alternatives and possibilities, I believe the education of it should mirror such an iterative, flexible role. Just as art and artists of new and diverse manifestations evolve, the ways in which we understand should evolve (NEA, 2011b; Sayers, 2011). Art is an expanded, open concept (Wittgenstein, 1953); there is no set answer to the question of the ontological status of a work of art and new forms of art can be incorporated (Thomasson, 2010). The temporal existence of art isn't bound by its moment of production or by the lifetime of a creator (Meyer, 2013), it isn't bound at all. Thus, a need for continued reflexivity on the topic of educating for aesthetic living.

Educative opportunities do not initiate and terminate with schooling, but are living endeavors of life-long preparation. As I can attest, education is often a process of learning, unlearning, and re-learning anew. Gablik (1991) warned that we must be wary in recognizing how our existing mental habits may impact new pedagogies, that education may demand reskilling within spaces of schooling and deschooling (Baldacchino, 2012), rethinking teacher education pedagogies (Irwin & O'Donoghue, 2012), as well as reconsidering pedagogic aims among other traditional cultural institutions and systems of exchange related to the arts.

As I have witnessed, institutions such as Tate Modern in London, are already implementing and opening more spaces for education. They are utilizing both physical and digital modalities for exhibiting and experimenting with new, diverse forms of art experiences. In many instances, museums are no longer acquisitive institutions beholding reliquaries. Rather, "today more and more museums are reaching out to an increasingly

diverse public” (Henry, 2010, p. 5) by creatively responding to the ways in which audiences want more opportunities for experience and participation. Museums are cultivating positive, memorable engagements so that the museumgoer no longer passively attends the museum “to walk through it so that they can say they have been to it, nodding on the way to those familiar objects that justify the institution’s renown” (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. 185).

I would be remiss, however, not to point out that there are oft hidden institutional controls and challenges for many museums and schools (Kwon, 2004) as it pertains to the inclusion of novel experiences. While art endeavors, such as those of a social or participatory nature, may be positively impactful or formidable in awakening us from stultified forms of knowledge, they may also create difficulties. In many of my experiences, participants did not always understand the messiness of live art; they did not know how, when, or where to participate. I, too, was included in this unknowingness.

Not all experiences are veteran ones. Subsequently, it is possible novel situations may create frustrations, especially if complexity is perceived as an irritating source of uncertainty. Since meaning does not lie on the surface; it is hermeneutically it is unearthed. Often when hermetically searching for deeper meaning, dilemmas and the unsettling properties of messiness may be frustrating. As novel or foreign artistic forms of practice are included, however, resistance may be encountered. Embracing unknowns is not always desired but novel situations present opportunities for new learning, but when addressed adequately, their benefit can far outweigh the negative potential (Barrett, 2012; Henry, 2010; Silverman 2010).

Since there are no prerequisites, no prior knowledge or training, no expertise of medium, and no understanding of technique necessary for aesthetic engagements with participatory art, one can potentially enter into spaces more democratically. The irony is that no experience is required to gain an experience or engage with the piece. However, I feel the risk in ignorance may be greater than the potential educative outcome gains. Moreover, while it is possible that some endeavors could be experienced best in nascence, as experience does not demand an understanding of aesthetic qualities prior to involvement, I feel that some insight is better than none. Perhaps this is, yet again, my bias emerging about education and its relevancy.

Experiential art education and aesthetic education cannot promise to support political emancipation (Rancière, 2004/2009a). Informed understanding doesn't equal or guarantee transformation, but cultivated understanding may carry opportunities for self-guided transformation later. We create meaning in art through experience and participation. Creating spaces of inquiry and experimentation through diverse forms of experiencing, participating, interpreting, and producing (Gude, 2007; 2010; 2012) enhance and potentially broaden our living. It is a process of promoting our critical consciousness in order to foster a climate where our thinking can change and our paradigms shift (hooks, 1995). Art and aesthetics can be educative for our living by opening the unexplored in order to provide ways to see beyond where currently possible; they can encourage crossing and multiplicity in moving beyond (Giroux, 1992; Slattery, 2003).

Through my participatory art experiences, my assumptions were undone and redefined magnanimously and repeatedly. I was embarrassed about the ways in which I so

imprudently narrowed and tried to define over and over in this inquiry. Like flipping off the switch, I never entertained ideas of critically engaging myself in why the aesthetic qualities were not present in an art experiences. However, I have come to see that this is the new knowledge I so desperately wanted. I have come to see beyond what was conceivably possible and I have explored anew. Though I was not transformed to live differently and I reached no quintessential or ubiquitous knowledge, learning did occur and I was shifted.

In aesthetically living, there are always new challenges, new questions, and new uncertainties. Black and white answers are not often available in these instances; our living is situated in the grey areas of life. Although such forms of ways of being are challenging and messy, they are essential to the lived experience. Teaching is generative, and subsequently when pedagogies shift toward experiential, participatory engagements of processes instead of products, so may our living. My hope is that others may use this narrative inquiry to help pass along some of what I have put forth.

Maybe Dewey (1934/2005) was right all along—that living as a work of art has great educative strength. Echoing his sentiment, I wonder in what ways might art reach people when it becomes a part of the realm of our everyday lived experience and not as an exotic or marginalized pursuit? Or, following Guattari (1992), in what ways might we bring pedagogy to life as if it were a work of art?

CHAPTER EIGHT:

LIVING AESTHETICS

Attempting Understanding

Artists often take the responsibility of reflecting and manifesting our multifaceted, complex world. The field of contemporary art is expanding ever so rapidly and ever so temporally, and socially oriented art forms are among the many ways in which contemporary artists are working. Becker (2012) contended that contemporary artists have chosen to work within “the public sphere because they discern that what is missing now is public discourse about the relationship of individuals to society” (p. 67). Hers was a sentiment shared by Rancière (2004/2009a) when he expressed how “Art no longer tries to respond to an excess of commodities and signs but rather to a lack of bonds” (p. 57).

It is often portended that society can no longer afford an economic or politically motivated system that values profits and commodities over human lives and aesthetic sensibilities. Again, art cannot promise to educe social change or guarantee transformation. However, society often rewards the behaviors of production and material goods; art will continue to take whatever shape deemed necessary—be it in experience, commodity, or otherwise. Artistic forms of contemporary participation may better resist the glibness that privileges drive for economic wealth over living, but I do not yet perceive them as any more ameliorative than another other art manifestation.

Far from dominant practice, social and participatory practices still exist in the periphery, yet their presence is identifiable. There is a pervasive influx of attentiveness to the participatory and experiential culture (e.g., Dobrzynski, 2013; The James Irvine Foundation, 2011). Although the aspirations of artists working within social situations vastly differ, through though varying practices and degrees, art becoming a more vital part of life is manifest. Artists, participants, and institutions are collaboratively, yet dissentially negotiating the challenging questions of our contemporaneous moment. Social and participatory art relations are messy and complicated, as is life. The same could be argued for living art experience.

Attempting to better understand these messy contemporary forms of artistic participatory practice, I placed myself in dissonant manifestations in the name of a hermeneutic undertaking. More times than I'd like to admit, I experienced vast slippages of understanding in doing so. Quite often, I stared down the enigma of what these artistic forms of practice could offer, only to find myself beleaguered incessantly, if not on the brink of irrationality. Pressing forward through the innumerable elements of inner conflict, it was within resistance where I tried to make space for new understanding.

A politically motivated art lies in the confluences of aesthetic qualities that are social, ethical, political, and relational. Although conceptually dense, I believe aesthetic qualities represent the ways in which we should aesthetically live. Situating thinking in experience, aesthetic qualities can impart ways of thinking contradiction. However, based on my experiences situated in this inquiry, locating art with all, or even most, of these aesthetic qualities is more than challenging, if not unlikely. Again, although the challenge was a

coherency of aesthetic qualities, locating such a living example was still challenging for me in practical application. Despite this challenge, I hold on to the hope that with the insight of this inquiry and future experience, I may better achieve living as a work of art.

As I have stated, I'm eternally interested in art that takes me somewhere I've never been. Memorable experiences are the ones where I worked through junctures and spaces to then derive anew. I know that I am a work in progress, that a politically motivated living art presents an immense challenge. I believe spaces of confounding inquiry is what quality art is about. It is within political motivations where I perceive art taking its ultimate strength, and it is within political motivations where I perceive the lived experience also taking its ultimate strength. Art's value lies in the unsettling conditions by which art is anything other than an end in itself.

Enduring Questions Prevail

Humbled by this inquiry, I acknowledge and appreciate the literal and metaphorical journey. With no guidebook assisting me, it is likely this inquiry took a circuitous, albeit perhaps necessary, route in order to move toward new understandings. It was a large task for anyone, albeit a worthy one. My work here is far from complete just as it is far from perfect. While I know my interpretation doesn't have to be "right" or the "truth" since it is one interpretation among interpretations, yet I would venture to guess that I will never be satisfied in asserting this, or any, knowledge confidently into the world.

I will likely come back to this inquiry with some elements of discontent, yet in the meantime, I suppose my interpretation for this moment will suffice. I resist closure and certitude but due to academic goals, I have come to terms in releasing this inquiry. I have

reached not a terminus point but a point of visitation. For me, this is a visitation because it is a temporary dispensation of what I can offer for my contemporaneous moment. In a sense, this interpretation is a timestamp of my current thinking, a snapshot of where I was intellectually at this given time.

Although I believe pure objectivity is unattainable and undesirable, I believe it is possible to get to a place in your thinking where singularity is no longer useful in moving forward. Since many of my participatory experiences in this inquiry were solitary enacted ones, going forward I would be interested in how collaboration could be more essential to my erudition. Although I was and still remain comfortable taking a backseat to others, I would be interested in exploring the ways in which I can learn about myself while in the process of knowing another.

Since “imagination is not so much what is born in the obscure heart of man as it is what arises in the luminous thickness of discourse” (Foucault, 1966/1998a, p. 173), I would be interested in the ways others may lend voices to further shaping this knowledge. I value how our living and the ways in which we learn are not isolatory, but enhanced with, by, and through others. I welcome diverse relations to help propel me forward. I desire to be a better participant in participatory endeavors, and I desire to continue learning *with* them, not necessarily *from* them.

Motivated by what lies ahead and experiences yet to come, always forming new questions, I will continue wrestling. Langer (1957) reminds that, “the mind of man is always fertile, ever creating and discarding, like the earth. There is always new life under old decay. Last year’s dead leaves hide not merely the seeds, but the fill-fledged green plants

of this year's spring, ready to bloom almost as soon as they are uncovered" (p. 17). I optimistically, yet still skeptically am inclined to investigate the possibilities for a life of understanding (Risser, 2012). I have questions that permeate, that linger with me. I will continue to question, continue to grapple and reexamine the liminal spaces of art, aesthetics, education, and beyond.

An inquiry now and one continuing forward, I extend not just a dialogue to others, but a participatory invitation to anyone willing to join me in further critically reconsidering their living as I have attempted to do. I am still exploring how and in what ways it might be possible to aesthetically live differently. Growth of knowledge cultivates growth of doubt and through my quest for greater insight I have arrived, yet also just begun. Cast back out into the seas of uncertainty, my questioning endures; inchoate I try giving pause to life.

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Black and white
once the beacon of truth
now ever so permeable
engulfed in subtleties
of revelation
while giving way toward grey.

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APPENDIX

IRB APPROVAL



Office of The Vice President for Research
DHHS Assurance ID No. : FWA00003901

Institutional Review Board
Human Subjects Office
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APPROVAL FORM

Date Proposal Received: 2013-03-29

Project Number: 2013-10848-0

Name	Title	Dept/Phone	Address	Email
Dr. Tracie Costantino	PI	Art Lamar Dodd School of Art 270 River Road N323 Lamar Dodd 706-542-1640		tcost@uga.edu
Ms. Melissa Hughes	CO	Art Education		mlhughes@uga.edu

Title of Study: Art by another name

45 CFR 46 Category: Administrative 2

Change(s) Required for Approval:

Parameters:

None;

Only approved for observation;

Approved : 2013-04-17 Begin date : 2013-04-17 Expiration date : 2018-04-16

NOTE: Any research conducted before the approval date or after the end date collection date shown above is not covered by IRB approval, and cannot be retroactively approved.

Number Assigned by Sponsored Programs:

Funding Agency:

Your human subjects study has been approved.

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to inform the IRB:

- ... of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to the subjects or others within 24 to 72 hours;
- ... of any significant changes or additions to your study and obtain approval of them before they are put into effect;
- ... that you need to extend the approval period beyond the expiration date shown above;
- ... that you have completed your data collection as approved, within the approval period shown above, so that your file may be closed.

For additional information regarding your responsibilities as an investigator refer to the IRB Guidelines.

Use the attached Researcher Request Form for requesting renewals, changes, or closures.

Keep this original approval form for your records.

Chairperson or Designee,
Institutional Review Board