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LACY, S.

2013

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**Imperfect Art: Working in Public
A Case Study of the Oakland Projects (1991–2001)**

Suzanne Lacy

PhD.

2013

IMPERFECT ART: WORKING IN PUBLIC

A Case Study of the Oakland Projects (1991–2001)

Suzanne Lacy

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requirements of the
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Abstract:

In *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art (1994)* the author called for a new language of critique for the transient and publicly located art practices known today as social, or public, practices. Since that time authors have taken up the challenge to site the work in art historical, philosophical, and cultural contexts and to assess its aesthetic merits. One of the major themes is how, exactly, the social claims in this work can be calculated. This paper adds to that discourse through the examination of a complex and lengthy set of art projects in Oakland, California, through the lens of critical pedagogy. The Oakland Projects (including performance, installation, exhibition, civic action, curriculum, and workshops) focused on social circumstances, popular media representation, and public policies regarding urban juveniles in California between 1991–2001. This research examined five sites—institutions within health, education, criminal justice, and civic policy, and youth experience. The praxis of classroom teaching and theories on education and democracy found in the literature of critical pedagogy offer a possible way to examine *how* this work might operate in the public sphere. The author traces the threads of a personal historiography of two significant teachers (in the 1970s) that metaphorically and practically provide a nexus of educational reform and avant-garde art as background to the examination of the Oakland Projects. In the process key issues in the work, including aesthetics and ethics, are examined, but the focus is on how forms of pedagogy—from the expanded notion of public pedagogy to the intimate level of the mentoring relationship—add dimension to the work’s claim to hold a relevant place within both the public and professional art spheres.

Keywords: social practice, visual art, Kaprow, education, Oakland, youth, performance

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own. The word count for the main body of thesis does not exceed 80,000 words.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Suzanne Lacy".

Signed: Suzanne Lacy

Date: 12/7/2013

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s I noticed that the prevailing images of the “teenager” in urban America no longer favored the delinquent white working-class kids of my generation. Now the “troubled” teen had a distinctive color, clothing, and language style, modeled on a sort of aberrant gangster interpretation of the Black Panthers. The effect of these media images reached beyond institutions that directly impact youth into areas like immigration and welfare policy. Youth’s real experiences remained a matter of private knowledge, locked inside communities that had little purchase on public voice. The only imagery created by teens themselves was from youth culture (like music), and that available to the mainstream media tended to reinforce stereotypes. Co-optation of inner-city youth culture was confusing for youth, turning a potential protest into a commodity. Their mediated expressions of defiance contributed to their ineffectuality in the public sphere and worse—to the heightening of public fear.

With its vibrant youth culture and large percentage of African American teens, Oakland was at the epicenter of a mix of cultural politics and activist organizing strategies focused on youth as part of a broader social critique on race and class inequalities. As sociologist Mike Males (1996) pointed out, the income of California youth dropped sharply between the 1970s and 90s, leaving a large percentage of the state’s youth in poverty. These changes were coincident with a variety of factors, but one in particular is relevant to this thesis: the rise in youth poverty reflected demographic changes in age—the state population had become younger—and ethnicity—the “minority” population was on its way to becoming the majority. Guided by the media images, middle-class residents of Oakland feared a rise in crime and seemed leery, for example, of high school students hanging out at street corners while waiting for a bus. Redevelopment plans for downtown Oakland were thought to be hindered by these fears.

In Oakland, where 25% of the population in 1990 was under the age of 18, a flood of organizations were formed, and strategies developed, to make institutions more responsive to youth. Early pioneers of racial equality, labor, free speech, and the Black Panthers were still active in public life. Progressive educators supported youth citizenship rights and penned ideas on youth development that often included arts and media inside of classrooms and after school,

especially important after the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 led eventually to the elimination of school funding for most of the arts.

These themes in youth politics and education were developing in parallel and sometimes intersecting manners with a new form of public art. Along with other artists, I was exploring the boundaries of art itself, and working with inner-city teens in the series of pieces I came to call the Oakland Projects felt to me like a way to examine career-long questions about the relationship to art and life.

In the early 90s I was already working on a series of lectures and texts that differentiated art sited in public places from art that takes up social and political positions relevant to and reflecting the lives of broad population groups defined by stereotypes and media framings. In *City Sites* (1989), I invited internationally known artists to lecture from institutional and organizational venues related to the broader social contexts their work addressed, with these sites serving as referents of a more complex surround to the work than that provided by art venues. For example, Adrian Piper talked about and demonstrated her “Funk Lessons” in a well-known blues nightclub, and John Malpede spoke in a Unitarian homeless shelter with a cohort of local residents. Subsequently I convened a conference at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1992) and a three-day retreat for artists, curators, and critics, which led to a collection of essays entitled *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Lacy 1994b).¹

At this retreat we discussed notions of “public”; alternative histories of public art; collaboration, political analysis, and democratic processes; engaging multiple and diverse audiences; individual and community transformation; artists’ roles and responsibilities; and relationships among curation, criticism, and art practices. Although we focused on artists from the United States working between 1960 and 1990, it was evident even then that the “practice” under consideration was worldwide. While different from each other in acknowledged respects, these works had unrecognized similarities that constituted grounds for an expanded conversation about public practices, providing a lens through which to inspect cross-disciplinary experiences, relationships to audiences, and political positions, resulting in a more nuanced notion of art in the public sphere. Our book *Mapping the Terrain* captured the moment and tilled an existing field, laying the ground for what would come next as we headed into the 21st century.

¹ Essayists included Judy Baca, Suzy Gablik, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Mary Jane Jacob, Allan Kaprow, Jeff Kelley, Suzanne Lacy, Lucy Lippard, Estella Conwill Majozo, Patricia Phillips, and Arlene Raven.

I was just beginning the performances later called “The Oakland Projects.” I was also trying to articulate the art practices behind the concept of “new genre public art.” As I indicated in *Mapping the Terrain*, this art—which “uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives—is based on engagement” (Lacy 1994b: 19). Critical debate stemmed from European theory that was, on the whole, not well informed on the depth, complexity, and original thought expressed in lengthy community-oriented public art projects. The exceptions, for the most part, were texts by artists writing about their own work.

When Susan Leibovitz Steinman and I began to gather descriptions of artists whose work reflected common concerns articulated by the 30 retreat participants for a compendium of artists’ works in *Mapping the Terrain*, it was an attempt to describe a variety of practices through the lens of political and social commentary and activism. From the 60s through the mid-90s, the push to explore “extra-art” ideas (in terms of content, siting, and invention of forms) became an exploratory context for community-sited and political work by activist artists. Yet the art world continued to question the fundamental possibility of visual art’s participation in social change. From the perspective of and case studies by artists producing this work, informal criteria arose for assessing a social/political artwork’s value both in the community and, without much theorizing, as art. One problem with applying a social or political analysis directly to artistic production is that it doesn’t deal with aesthetic intentions’ nevertheless, applying criteria of success in community to artistic success tended to further the discourse even while simplifying it.

One of the more compelling arguments against community-based work proposed in the early 90s was actually a critique of the art professions and institutions, but it first manifested as a critique of the work. Citing the “parachute” phenomenon, it raised questions about the efficacy of artists working in places in which they were not deeply invested or where they did not live. This geographical critique was also a critique of cultural “belongingness,” but at bottom was an ethical charge that the artist was exploiting a social situation for personal benefit. These criticisms were sometimes voiced by the communities themselves, but they usually arrived in the art world via critics trying to grapple with the theory and practice of working in community. Although I think the discourse of belongingness and membership has been greatly simplified, one of the impetuses of the Oakland Projects was to explore duration, intimacy, and the relationship of the artist to the “place” of the work.

The Oakland Projects focused on local youth, aspects of their social circumstances (particularly as these contribute to their relationship with the community and, ultimately, with civic life), the

treatment of their “image” through mass media, and the policy and programmatic results of attitudes perpetrated by public representation. My collaborators and I examined the institutions that “serve” youth in four key intersecting areas—health, education, criminal justice, and civic legislation—and the public attitudes that evoked policies and programs impacting youth in each. In a series of large and small projects over ten years, we deployed strategies from youth development and empowerment, inter-institutional collaboration, pedagogy, and media intervention, as well as installation, performance, and video art, to constitute a public practice with an active role in local civic processes.

As public practice in visual art is currently framed, we employed art practices that may, simultaneously, be seen as civic ones. By detailing these practices, this thesis offers an exploration of how activist art can promote community-building around common values, increase public awareness, influence civic institutions, and foster an inclusive civic discourse. The individual performances within the Oakland Projects, beginning with *Teenage Living Room*, were conceived, as we progressed, as a sequential and evolving series, one performance or action growing out of the necessity produced by its predecessor. In this thesis, however, I am looking back at the project as a whole to extract the ways in which life and art intertwined, particularly in terms of personal relationship and political education. Although each performance or installation could be reviewed in its own right—and heretofore this has been the approach of most writers, including myself—the body of work, extending over a decade, can and should be seen in its entirety. That means a detailed investigation of the fabric of relationality, negotiation, research, education and action that took place between the performances and installations, leading up to and after each work.

The Oakland Projects were, for me, a test case in my own propositions, formulated early in my career—that the arts can have a substantial impact on public awareness and hence public agendas, but of course that brings up the issue of how does one know this? One answer is to more carefully frame how an artist operates, whether as cultural critics, consensus builders, advocates, or some other significant and perhaps unique role in the public sphere. These issues have come into focus since 2000 as theorists and critics have begun to substantively engage with the claims for social practice art and articulate its theoretical underpinnings. During the 90s, however, most texts on social and political visual art were still a long distance from direct strategic relevance to those practitioners working outside the museum. Many questions about the nature of contemporary art-making begged to be explored. How far, for instance, must an artist go toward another type of endeavor, say politics or education, in order to effectively participate in civic issues? What happens to a work of art when function or use-value takes over? How far into the public realm can an artist venture without turning into something else,

such as the head of an organization? In that case, is he/she still making art? And what position can a project assume in public life, balancing between fine art (with all its professional trappings) and social utility, often understood differently “outside” of art? These questions surfaced for me repeatedly during the Oakland Projects, part of my own aesthetic investigation.

Drawing on the Oakland Projects as a case study, this thesis presents an evolving and operational definition of “public” or “social” practices in visual arts, describing and to some degree analyzing the *multiple narratives* within this kind of work, including themes of mentorship, community activation, politics of youth culture, and changes in police culture. Narratives are presented based on their significance in designing the work and in their potential to impact the civic sphere. However, it would not be accurate to speak of the Oakland Projects solely in terms of art practice and theory. My intention is to hold in mind two simultaneous stories—the work as a social narrative and the work as an expansive and durational art performance—an intention, I would argue, that itself is an important signifier of this hybrid practice.

The social narrative includes the national political and cultural context for the issues, the institutional systems that influence the conditions in young people’s lives, and the policies that reveal what is truly at stake. The arts narrative includes aesthetic critique applied to community-based, social, or public practices; the subsequent documentation and display of the work in arts venues; and other critical theories, for instance ones on pedagogy, that might shed light on thinking about this form of art.

I am also drafting these narratives as a means of considering HOW, and in some personal sense WHY, the works were made *as art*—that is, what might distinguish this work from other types of institutionalized practices like teaching. Although in the last chapter I suggest a few directions for assessing the success or failure of this work as social action and the perfection or imperfection of it as art, I think the major contribution I can make here is curatorial, assembling some of the multiple narratives and, through interviews, multiple voices of the project. (Perhaps because early in my education I was trained in science, I realize that an “evaluation” from my vantage point would be extremely flawed in terms of any “truth” it might reveal, considering my inherent bias as one of the primary makers.) What I can do is summarize a broad and multi-vocal set of descriptions of the events that transpired over ten years and make suggestions about ways to think about these narratives as art and as social action.

While impact of the work/action is a key issue in social and political work, framing is important in discussing this art. When I work in communities outside of the one in which I live, the easy

answer to what is, and is not, the work of art (where do we place the frame?) is often a geographic and temporal boundary framed by my attention—a remnant of the artistic authorship legacy from which I came. It's art because I say it is (not necessarily good art). But what if the work takes place in one's own home, where one lives? Where does the "art" frame fall; and what distinguishes it from "life," as in Allan Kaprow's description of life-like art? If we look at the Oakland Projects not as a series of individual performances but as an entire work, the "relational glue" holding the whole together becomes relevant to issues of intention, impact, and aesthetics, or quality of the work. It is impossible to work with complexity and on a scale as large as a city without examining the interconnectivity based on multiple sets of relationalities within a series of "publics" formed for, or captured within, the project.

The charismatic but often criticized term "relational aesthetics," introduced by Nicolas Bourriaud (1998), is accurate in that it attempts to capture a temporal and performative sociality central to how the work is framed aesthetically. As I have explained elsewhere:

Bourriaud attempts to establish clear distinctions. He heralds a group of artists who operate "relationally" but whose work is utopian and without application or "usefulness" outside of the specific social environment created by the work, as different from artists who make clear claim to function in civic life. Conveniently, the work he reports on can easily be found in the presenting platforms of choice, exhibitions and biennales, although some of the best of this "relational" work takes place in harder to access artist-initiated venues. [Lacy 2008: 23]

In a sense, performing relational aesthetics in gallery settings is a bit like an experiment in a laboratory with controlled conditions. When applied to a social or political field for a lengthy time, the produced "publics" and "relationalities" are vastly complicated and somewhat impervious, up until recently, to theorizing. If an artist takes as a project the "re-siting" of the relational project outside the convenient definer of gallery or museum space, what then results? Is it no longer art? That seems hardly reasonable given the past forty years of experimentation in site and media, including psychology, sociology, and urban development, to name a few.

In terms of relationships inside of gallery-sited (conviviality is one term of choice) the focus is often on food, serving, providing, and/or "permissioning" a group of people for specified amounts of time. Products that represent the interaction might, or might not, be created for later display. How does this apply to a larger social sphere? Is testifying in court on behalf of a student a demonstration of social responsibility, dues paid to earn one's way into a particular territory, or (as I believe) part of the fabric that in fact *constitutes the materiality* of the work?

At least in Oakland, these relationships, some of which continue today, are among the richest and most meaningful aspects of the work, perhaps because of their very duration or their intention to speak across borders and territorialities.

Among many critiques, one quite relevant to this work is the perpetuation of a conflict between “useful” and “aesthetically sound.” Apparent usefulness in any of a number of registers is not a convincing argument for “good” in art. On the other end of the critical spectrum, coming from those who are building a case for art’s usefulness in regeneration (in the UK) or its role in civic discourse (in the U.S.), functionalism is prioritized. The functionalism of art that is clearly operationalized in the service of a civic agenda is not the same as that of a strategy adopted by the artist to unravel and nuance the aesthetic dimensions of fragile human negotiations in public. Because of the amount of new critical art theory, the field is beginning to unpack the stereotype—use + art = bad art—to arrive at criteria that draw from a range of sources—specific artist’s practices as seen *in situ*, listening to the many voices of those who participate (not just a select few), and the histories and theories that frames and informs disparate work.

I am first a practicing artist, although one of many who write, and I am interested not only in the work’s relationship to aesthetic and social themes, but in the strategies and technicalities of art production, which, according to Bristol-based theorist and producer Claire Doherty, themselves constitute a form of artistic “research” (2009, personal conversation). The complexity of such an extensive artwork as the Oakland Project deters all but the very determined from understanding the multiple actions, engagements, exchanges, strategies, and meanings that make up this project. Moreover, its strong claim to public life and efficacy—in fact the entire body of work was premised on an exploration of the boundary between “art” and “life”—makes the Oakland Projects a case study worth unpacking. Taking place, as it did, outside of major art distribution systems, this work was a deep, durational, and intensely local engagement.

I argue that only by looking at the complex narratives in the artwork, those curated by the artist(s) or collaborators, can one forward the conversation on large-scale work that extends over time. To do this for the Oakland Projects, I am first examining closely (although not exhaustively) the period between 1991 and 2001 as it pertains to Oakland and youth culture/representation, the series of public performances and installations co-authored with multiple artists and activists, and the relationships in and between these works. In addition to the files for the Oakland Projects I have interviews with some forty participants and collaborators—former students, police officers, mayors, teachers, artists, and the like—done retrospectively in the years after the projects ended. My examination is also informed by my development of and teaching within, an MFA program in social practices at Otis College of Art

and Design, which has kept me apprised of how these issues can best be considered and communicated within the academic sphere.²

I hope through this telling to identify key points of tension—between aesthetics and ethics, authorship/creative drive and representation, quality and imperfection—that arise through the experience of actually making the work, offering an artist’s point of view on these issues. Although I have never been able to resolve these tensions completely—and new issues emerge with every work—through recounting this narration I hope to trouble the boundaries between art and social experience from the vantage point of a framer of intersections and interstices. The translation of haptic and durational processes into existing languages of visual art—that with is exhibited, documented, written about within contemporary journals, or somehow displayed for others—is problematized with many ethical and aesthetic questions, but underneath is an ongoing discourse on what constitutes visual art and how far we might go in redrawing its boundaries. With this work I add the artist as one voice, the one with the deepest knowledge of the work.

Methodology

Review of Primary Source Documents

This thesis assembles stories of the Oakland Projects through primary documents that reveal production strategies, unresolved conflicts, points of negotiation, and ethical contradictions. The extensive files for the projects (approximately 20 file boxes of raw and completed videos, texts, news articles, proposals, interviews, curricula, and photos) give ample evidence of the process of these works, informed by history and current conditions in Oakland public life (Lacy 1991–2001). The audio/visual documentation alone is complex: television documentary and news clips, video programs ranging from 3 to 55 minutes, youth-produced video, television programs, interviews, and public presentations made during and immediately subsequent to the Oakland Projects.

In reviewing various computer files and printed documents, I chose to excerpt segments written by myself and others in order to retain original language.³ I also examined the transcripts of

² I designed the curriculum at Otis College of Art and Design, in Los Angeles, at the same time as I began this current research process. The continuing changes and revisions reflect the changes in the field of art practice as well as the field of art education, as I have experienced them.

³ The use of electronic files to communicate and document processes in the Oakland Projects emerged in the middle of this decade, coincident with increased availability of computer technology. Early in the project the fax was a major

videotaped interviews and documentaries produced by project artists, youth, and news media, and have included brief sections of these in the online appendix, along with the videos themselves. This review process has been laborious and not without the emotional content inherent in re-experiencing the relationships, new knowledge, and negotiations that were central to the ten years of my life during the production of this work. These primary documents ensure that the overall narrative of the Oakland Projects and the individual productions within it—including the performances and installations *The Roof Is On Fire*, *No Blood/No Foul*, *Expectations*, *Code 33*, and *Eye 2 Eye*—are not subject to my singular memory (Appendix 2 Boxes 1-13, Lacy 1991-2001).

My review of all this material impressed on me the monumentality and complexity of the Oakland Projects and how the production of each of the various performances, projects, and installations was substantively mixed with social questions: (1) how to provide a youth-centered, radical and relevant education for the high school youth with whom we worked, (2) how to influence local policies and institutional programs, and (3) whether to create an ongoing organization to further the goals of the project or retain its identity as art in a series of performances, installations, and videos.

Interviews with Collaborators and Participants

A major claim of this work is that it is collaborative and multi-vocal, echoing the complexity of contemporary public life. Thoughtful interviews with multiple informants uphold the work's claims to collaboration and provide an antidote to the tendency to represent one's work in its best, if inaccurate, light. This re-centers and problematizes the critical discourse around the identity and operation of these works and serves as a preliminary, albeit as yet undeveloped, model for what I call "multi-vocal" criticism.

As part of the research for this thesis, I interviewed approximately 40 participants of all ages and occupations—collaborators, performers, or witnesses to the Oakland Projects—during and after the engagement, some as much as 15 years later. These interviews were conducted one on one, with me as the interlocutor, or occasionally in groups of three, where collaborators like Unique Holland also asked the questions. The interviews were arranged via phone or email, and I traveled from Los Angeles to Oakland, and occasionally to other cities, to conduct them. They

method of communication, and some of these documents have faded considerably. As it was, computers were not in extensive-enough use by 1999 to serve as a basis for organizing youth participation, which was done by direct, not electronic, engagement.

lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours. Interviewees were selected based on long-term relationships (so that my calling them to ask for an interview was not particularly surprising or unusual); on the spread of people over the ten-year period; on the “position” they occupied in life or in the project; on their ability to articulate their distinctive positions; and on their availability.

The interviews were conducted informally, in homes or coffee shops or parks, and were not distinct from the conversational tone of our earlier relationships. Using cameras and tape recorders to record each other’s experiences and opinions was a lingua franca of the Oakland Projects even before the advent of the camera phone and Facebook, and most of us were used to it. During the projects I was not only interviewer but also interviewee, and many people had the role of moderator of both formal and informal presentations that were recorded. Youth were trained to interview each other and adults, and to give interviews to, for example, the media. Formulating perspectives, relating experience to the political surround, and offering these ideas through media technologies was, in fact, a primary strategy of the work.

The interviews for this thesis were conducted more as a conversation than as a series of controlled questions, a deliberate choice in keeping with the relational quality of the Oakland Projects. In general, they offered the interviewee and myself an opportunity to reflect on the work we did together and major themes that remained salient for them, many years later. That necessarily entailed a reflection on what we did and did not accomplish. I asked four questions fairly consistently, however: Who are you and what is your relationship to Oakland and youth? What did you do in the Oakland Projects? What is your assessment of our successes and failures? Was what we did “art,” and if so how do you think about that question?

Working in Public: Seminar Series Produced by “On the Edge” Research Program at Gray’s School of Art

As part of my research I participated in a series of four seminars produced by my thesis advisor, Anne Douglas, and her colleagues at the “On the Edge” research program at Gray’s School of Art at Robert Gordon University. The series “Working in Public” brought together artists, theorists, curators, and arts administrators whose work directly touched on issues in social and cultural life, including policy. My work with the Oakland Projects served as a core example for the issues discussed on art and civic process in Scotland. The reflective process of seminars was designed to supplement my own writing and research while providing a space for interrogation of the practice by many artists, teachers, and organizational leaders in Scotland. In addition, the seminars provided me with an opportunity to make cultural comparisons that revealed new

insights, for example the very different way that government supports, and some say operationalizes, social practice in the UK. The seminars were structured around public dialogues with three international theorists who commented on my work with the Oakland Projects and presented various positions from their writing. These teachings were presented to a working-learning team of art and culture professionals, who in this way had the opportunity to reflect on their own public practices.

Each of the four seminars focused on topics relevant to this thesis: aesthetics and ethics, representation and power, quality and imperfection, and art and public policy. In each, critics whose thinking has a direct bearing on public practices offered insights that added to my review of their prior literature output.⁴ Specifically, Grant Kester (2008) addressed such questions as: “What is the specific orientation of ‘art’ outside art institutional settings . . . [and] what forms of knowledge are generated in the intersection between art discourse and other, parallel systems of action?” Tom Trevor, director of the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, and Francis McKee, director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow, explored the question of institutional role in supporting public practices. Simon Sheikh highlighted the multiplicity of public(s) inherent in any social interaction. Finally, in a public conversation held in a meeting room at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, journalist Moira Jeffrey and Nicol Stephens, MSP, helped lead a discussion of the relation between art projects and the civic sphere in Scotland.

Holding up aspects of the Oakland Projects for public inspection and critique during these seminars allowed me to better formulate the topics of inquiry in my thesis. Ethics, for example, figured significantly in our conversations, and even led to contention on our uneven gender representation—only male speakers—from the largely female seminar group. The seminars deepened understanding and critical discourse on public practice as a form of visual art different from other forms of civic action, in a pedagogic environment that was itself modeled after these kinds of artistic practices.

Graduate Public Practice Program, Otis College of Art and Design

While working on this thesis, I designed, submitted for accreditation review, and launched an MFA program in public practice at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. To date we have graduated five cohorts of students, who are now working in various countries in different manners as artists and/or activists and educators.

⁴ Transcripts and papers from these seminars can be found at <http://ontheedgeresearch.org/working-in-public/>

By design, my curriculum for the two-year program reflects a discursive and project-based approach, where each year's entering cohort of students begins with a community group project under the leadership of a practicing artist or curator. It includes intensive one-to-one mentoring to support students in establishing their practice and research questions. Students are encouraged to seek out those artists in Los Angeles and beyond, who, through their practices, serve as role models. One of the complexities of such education programs is how to teach, simultaneously, art theory and practice along with an analytic research methodology. Each artist working in this field is obligated to become an expert, in some sense, on the issues she deals with in her work. For the Oakland Projects, for example, an awareness of the institutional legacies of racism, the use of media for political scapegoating, health issues for youth, and the histories and practices of incarceration were critical to the work. Each new territory spawns its own trajectories: understanding the implications of criminal justice system in youth lives means looking at, for example, adoption of community policing policies, strategies for truancy, laws impacting the definition of juvenile justice, and the current funding of juvenile probation programs.

How to approach this kind of ethnographic study—from the vantage points of political issues, social context, art theory, and aesthetics—is, in a sense, the same question that raises dilemmas in educating students to be social practitioners.⁵ Each year faculty in the Otis public practice program review what worked and what didn't and apply the same questions we face in our practices as theorists, curators, and artists to our mutual educational endeavors. The continuing analysis of applied pedagogy mirrors, in some sense, my position as an artist working in communities. Critical pedagogy theories have as much impact on my thinking as an artist as do aesthetic theories; in fact, one could suggest that the evolution of the field of social practice leads us to inevitably consider the notion of public pedagogy.⁶ My experience in this MFA environment provides a current vantage point from which to consider the tremendous changes in social and public art practices since the beginning of the Oakland Projects narrative in the early 1990s.

⁵ For this reason our admissions policies at Otis differ from those of many MFA programs. We admit people with a developed research perspective and practice who have some experience in the arts, as well as people with a more traditionally developed (BFA) arts and theory practice. The continuing problem in this form of education is how to educate for both art and social practice simultaneously.

⁶ In our Otis MFA program, students are required to have some form of practical experience in teaching (in any of a number of settings, including the institutional ones) and are required to take a short course in understanding the relationship between that individual experience of teaching, the public practice of art, and concepts of public pedagogy.

Building a Critical Position for the Artist's Voice

This thesis places the complicated narrative of the Oakland Projects in the art historical record and attempts to unpack some key stereotypes and conflicts argued in the field. The rapid growth of critical and theoretical literature since the time of these projects prompts speculation and new thinking; it is the practice, however, that remains fundamental to my analysis—what I know from what I have learned while making art.

In the 12 years since the Oakland Projects, social/public practice has become the subject of critical reviews, theories, and descriptions of artists' works. As of this writing, social/public practice is constituted by a small body of theories and working methodologies, distributed around the world, with some similarities and differences defined for the most part by theorists or practicing artists. We see works that include collaboration and conversation on the one hand, and nightmare and hell on the other (Kester 2004, Kester 2011, Miessen 2011, Bishop 2012). An ever-growing wealth of theorists and practitioners are adding to this field, raising challenging questions and articulating nuances and complexities.⁷ (Hence it is now possible to build a graduate MFA curriculum entirely within this single field.)

More frequently now we are beginning to see lengthy descriptions and case studies. With these accounts we can begin to compare one work to another in terms of key details that might not be immediately observable because of art world conventions of display. Intricacies of scale and duration are difficult to communicate, for example, in terms of the texture of the work, other than the obvious: how many years did it take? Or how big was your audience? These superficial interrogations of key aesthetic topics tend to obscure what might be essentially new forms of art in the making.

As Grant Kester suggests in *Conversation Pieces* (2004), the relationship between public arts practitioner and critic/theorist is often complicated by the inaccessibility of artworks that take place over long periods of time, in places far from artistic centers. Analyses of public practices from an art theoretical position are rarely as informed, as is Kester's, by a close reading of individual artists' practices where and when they occur, in the field. I have written elsewhere:

... unfortunately some writers have little experience of actual field practices and tend to apply unexamined stereotypes to work they only read about or witnessed from a

⁷ See, for example, Bishop 2012, Doherty 2004, Finkelppearl 2000, Finkelppearl 2013, Jackson 2011, Jacob and Brenson 1996, Kester 2004, Kester 2011, Sholette 2011, and Thompson 2012.

distance. However, now that strategy, concept and even imagery is shared by artists operating inside as well as outside of traditional art venues, claiming that community-based art projects are inferior or “not art” has become more difficult. [Lacy 2008: 23]

In *Conversation Pieces*, Kester travels extensively, using case studies from artists around the world to demonstrate an evolving argument that links the aesthetics of conversation framing to the legacy of the avant-garde. “A work of art can elicit a more open attitude toward new and different forms of experience,” while “challenging the assumption that avant-garde art must be shocking or difficult to understand” (9), Kester suggests, adding that normative assumptions of art criticism that centralize the art object and presume a specular relationship with an audience do not translate well to work that is durational, collaborative, and not particularly conducive to visual pleasure.

The international interest in local art practices has only increased the problems for critics, because meaning in this type of art is so dependent upon context: the work is extensive, covers a range of issues, is culturally specific, calls for expertise in fields outside of the arts, and takes a long time to produce. Simple observation over a short period of time provides little real insight. Field projects exhibited retrospectively in art venues mostly do not reveal the depth and quality of the prior or coincident engagements they are seen to represent, as such documentation provides little visual pleasure and, even if it does, can be read suspiciously close to cheery advertisements of happy participants.⁸ As I have written elsewhere, it may be that for artists whose inspirations range far afield from those of “art for art’s sake” artists, discourses outside of the visual arts could be more relevant to explain the work (Lacy 2004). As one example, the influence of Buddhism on American art during the 1950s in the U.S. resulted in artists whose experimental and genre-bending ideas set the aesthetic stage for new genre public art. Today there is a resurgence of interest in Buddhist art and many long-time community-based artists have more than a passing interest in Buddhist spirituality, a referential system they find more conducive to their intentions.⁹

⁸ My own experience with this issue comes from *The Crystal Quilt*, which was recently acquired by Tate Modern. When it was initially exhibited there, the representations that had been acquired (including sound, video, photos, and the quilt) did not really portray the social and representational aspects of the work. The institutional limitations convinced me that how to represent really broad-based collaborative and participatory art in institutions is still a struggle.

⁹ An example might be the practices of artist Brett Cook-Dizney, whose community organizing/art education installations in black and Hispanic neighborhoods can be understood as a form of service. It is questionable whether a foundation for understanding this tricky concept—service—as part of an art practice can be found in the work of Western theorists.

Since the late 1990s the Animating Democracy Initiative (ADI) has taken on these issues of criticism as part of a larger agenda to understand creative engagement and community development as these themes occur across the spectrum of arts. With a major grant from the Ford Foundation in 1996, Americans for the Arts conducted a study of artists and writers across to determine how to identify and support civic arts (Schaeffer Bacon, Yuen, and Korza 1999). ADI's premise that democracy can be animated by the multiple perspectives of an informed public evolved into what they called "arts-based civic dialogue"—art that consciously incorporates civic dialogue as part of an aesthetic strategy. ADI selected 32 exemplary projects nationwide and set out to nurture both the artists and the presenting cultural institutions and, in so doing, to support the emergence of visual art, theater, music, and dance that operates with authority in the public realm and stimulates, as was the premise, public discourse.

ADI deployed groups of writers to follow the developmental paths of the works. ADI's Critical Perspectives Project, directed by Caron Atlas, paired up to three writers on a single project (Atlas and Korza 2005). The writers brought creative, documentary, and critical perspectives from within and outside the local community to consider the project's aesthetic and civic process. Each team of writers worked in a semi-embedded way, returning repeatedly to witness progress.¹⁰ At a 2002 meeting of the ADI Critical Perspectives Project in San Francisco writers asked: "What is the role of the writer in civically engaged art? Is the writer a documenter, critic, collaborator, witness, or advocate? What is the relationship between the writer and the artists, the writer and sponsoring organizations, the writer and the community, the writer and the reader?" (Assaf 2003: 5). More conventional paradigms of criticism position the writer as a voice of authority or expertise, empowered to assess or judge the relative success or failure of an art project, usually according to terms defined by the critic or current norms of critical practice. Instead, the Critical Perspectives writers had "the challenge of trying to access all the pieces of the process, through interviews, public documentation, existing media coverage, and so on, knowing that the final piece is not representative of the whole" (Assaf 2003:6).

Three critical approaches are potentially best undertaken by those with a unique access to the work over time: close reading, multi-vocality, and, when necessary, exploring histories and

¹⁰ In one example, Dell' Arte International, a physical theater group in a rural region of Northern California, explored the economic impact and cultural and political conflict surrounding the construction of a Native American casino. Journalist David Rooks, an Oglala Lakota tribal member; playwright and arts writer Ferdinand Lewis; and arts writer and critic Jim O'Quinn, editor of *American Theatre* magazine, all worked in close range with each other, the artists, and the town residents, exploring perspectives both within the Native American culture and the community at large.

theories other than those presented in current art canons to dimensionalize the work according to its own terms. I will touch on the first two here and, in the conclusion, provide an example of how critical pedagogy might add different understandings to the Oakland Projects.

Close reading critique is developed through legwork and immersion, following a work from beginning to end. Few other than the artist(s) are present enough to do this, and in complicated projects even those designated as “artists” are not there for everything. For those artists who create their own structures of support and display (but whose practices might offer us a more realistic look at how art truly operates in civic life), close reading of existing archival and historical documents, an approach usually reserved for long-dead artists, might situate what appears to be simplistic within a more complicating set of conversations and daily actions, large and small.

A writer with intimate access follows the process of the work, describing and analyzing, somewhat like being in the studio from inspiration to exhibition. Moira Roth, for example, is a prolific writer who has followed the development of avant-garde and performance art for several decades, writing on artists from Marcel Duchamp to Robert Smithson to Sudipa Biswas. Roth brings her own aesthetics into her critical practice: conversation, relationality, research, associative referencing, poetic narrative, and subjectivity. The result, when applied to a lengthy production phase of a work, offers an intimate look at the processes involved in new genre public art. Roth followed the final pre-production weeks of *Code 33* from the Oakland Projects, a performance involving 100 police officers and 150 youth in downtown Oakland amidst a conflicted public and media environment. Published in the *Performing Art Journal*, her close reading of process provided an entertaining and revealing narrative that encompassed the personal and strategic demands of this work and its complications (Roth 2001).

The critical practice of close reading expands, amplifies, and adds complexity to the discourse. Conversation rather than visual experience is foregrounded as a method of inquiry, which explains the spate of books that feature conversation: *Dialogues in Public Art* by Tom Finkelpearl (2000), *Conversations before the End of Time* by Suzi Gablik (1997), *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art* edited by Mary Jane Jacob and Michael Brenson (1996), and *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* by Grant Kester (2004). In the “On the Edge” program at Gray’s School of Art, project leaders Carole Gray and Anne Douglas embedded a model of multi-vocal criticism into their research, creating a web of authority and responsibility among community residents, academics, and artists working together in the Shetland Islands. This ethnographic model of subjective and embedded critique challenged the notion of the primacy of a single critical voice.

“Multi-vocality” is a term I have used to describe “an evaluation that includes many voices but is qualitative, not quantitative” (Lacy 2008: 22). A major claim of this work is that it represents a collaborative approach and multiple voices, echoing the complexity of contemporary public life.

Multi-vocal criticism features contributions from varied positions of expertise to a multifaceted and coherent whole—one that includes aesthetics. While there are many projects where people are given voice as participants, the focus has been on description, testimonial, or personal anecdote. One challenge to including nonartist partners in critique is accounting for differences between avant-garde and popular concepts of art. Another challenge involves how to integrate the institutional and political perspectives of partners with artistic process. [Lacy 2008: 23]

My call for multi-vocality as a critical tool is not to deny the contribution of the artist as raconteur, for the artist has much to offer in assessing a practice that is complicated, durational, addresses material, practical, and intentional issues that art critics are not necessarily versed in, and takes place, substantially speaking, in manners and places not totally accessible to the critic. Yet, having said this, I admit that bias is one of the most vulnerable areas of any artist’s account of her/his work. In relation to this thesis, I am performing multiple roles, as one of the creators of the artwork, as a curator and recorder of the narratives, and, through writing it down, as contributor to the discourse in the field. Perceptual biases are inherent in such reporting. I have no answer for this; I am not a dispassionate observer, although many writing on art are also biased; in fact, art critiques have no need to be anything other than subjective.

In these narratives in the chapter that follows, I have referred frequently to texts written by others as well as my own from that decade, and included examples of interactions that were personally difficult to experience the first time, and not pleasant years later. But in truth I am the author, and I’ve organized this material in terms of my own perception on what is important. I can only suggest that the reader must filter these accounts through her own skepticism and experiences. There are enough archival materials that should anyone undertake a more thorough study than this thesis presents, it will be available for other conclusions. The interviews with collaborators (samples included in the online appendices) will also be relevant, but here again I was the interviewer. As Andrea Assaf (2003) notes in reporting on the Critical Perspectives conference: “While the insider perspective offers a more intimate and detailed account that can be useful to others—a kind of witnessing as curator, educator, and theorist Lydia Matthews suggested—it’s also subject to potential pressure from internal relationships and power

dynamics. Atlas added that interviewees often say what they think the interviewer expects them to say; and at the same time, they often do or say the unexpected” (2003:6).

Matthews asked, “How does our desired context or audience affect the content of a piece? Are we trying to develop a kind of writing that moves across multiple audiences and develops a hybrid sensibility, or are we trying to challenge our own specific fields?” (Assaf 2003: 8). If one takes the entire 10 years of the Oakland Projects and later representations into account, the possible audiences for this thesis are, in a sense, as multivalent as the collaborators and participants.

My obligation here is to developing a discourse within the field of social practice art and my intended audience is artists themselves, particularly young artists who still believe they can make a difference in their work. I believe that the renewed interests in social practice calls for more pragmatic and nuanced discussions about effective and pragmatic strategies, conversations on an artist’s position vis-à-vis publics produced by the work, and how relationships as material operate beyond the gallery. What are the tiny decisions, points of negotiation, conversations and co-operations that inform the development of the whole? What is inside the practice that only the practitioner can articulate?

In the midst of a discourse now nuanced with theory in a practice that means to operate on the ground with diverse people, it is my premise that difficult and complicated case studies—the “messy” ones that mirror complex social and relational processes—will provide a grounded praxis for an examination of what Allan Kaprow called “life-like art” and what Joseph Beuys called “social sculpture.” Through this thesis I hope to contribute to this discourse by a close examination of a coherent and extensive series of public art projects, co-authored with multiple artists and activists. Extending over long durations, projects like this are seldom recorded, reviewed, and displayed with a depth that matches the practice. This is definitely true of the Oakland Projects, and even I have been at times overwhelmed with the sheer volume of data that exists to be mined. Yet the stubborn materiality of this evidence continues to draw me to at least some form of telling. The narratives provided by the artist might not be the most “objective,” but they should not be discounted in exploring accurate and engaging ways to cross-reference complex social narratives with histories and theories of art discourse, and to re-language this work within a referent system of visual art from at least the perspective of the maker(s).

This is one “imperfection” in a very imperfect art. Imperfection is not currently in common use in the arts. Instead we speak of critical failure or, more charitably, unrealized projects.

Imperfection is a difficult subject when applied to one's own work (although I suppose it is better than failure), but in some sense the word might be the most descriptive of all for a practice that bases its very existence on the cracks and interstices, the fault lines and injustices, the failures and contradictions in civic life—and correspondingly the imperfections of art as a social practice embedded in daily life.

CHAPTER 2
THE OAKLAND PROJECTS NARRATIVE

When you're walking down the street and you see people cross to the other side or hold on to their purse all tight it kind of makes me angry, but it kind of makes me laugh. It makes me angry because the people who don't know think that's all black people are about or that's all young people are about. [Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

It was almost 20 years ago, but I still vividly remember the sidewalks in front of the art college in Oakland where I worked. Each day around 3:30 they filled with teenagers from the high school down the street as they waited for the city buses on Broadway. Jostling, yelling, laughing, and hopping around in improvised dance steps, for a half hour they seemed to be conspicuously and self-consciously on display for neighborhood residents and commercial store owners, college students, and faculty. They moved as a flock or an interconnected group, completely filling the narrow walkway between the college's cinderblock fence and the generous and trafficked street that was the main artery of the city. Their clothes were colorful, tight, and short on the "females," and sloppy, oversized, and monochromatic hanging off the "males." (I soon learned that in Oakland young people referred to girls and women, and boys and men, by their gender designations, a seemingly non-ironic adoption of cop lingo.) They scarcely noticed me, a short white woman leaving the lush gardens of our secluded campus through the large wrought-iron gate, even as I sought eye contact and smiled at them. They were into each other and seemed defiantly bent on ignoring those around them in this middle-class neighborhood. Perhaps they avoided anticipated disapproval; and if not, in the arrogance of youth they could afford to ignore potential envy or admiration.

As elsewhere in Oakland, on this street the ages, classes, and races of people bumped up against each other irrespective of differences. The college where I worked was on the border between "The Flats," comprised of middle to lower socioeconomic groups, and "The Hills," made up of middle to upper income people, in a city where neighborhoods are more segregated by class than ethnicity. I was curious: who were these extravagant young people with their hooded sweatshirts, baggy pants, and loud theatrical street discourse? It was hard to stare long enough to separate them as individuals without appearing rude or intrusive. But the overall perceptual effect was an attractive one—textural, colorful, and sonorous—with a group synergy that, in excluding me and the others on the street, created an almost theatrical bubble.

I was vaguely aware of increasingly ominous images of youth in the early 1990s California mediascape: unwed teenaged mothers, high school truants and dropouts, drug addicts and criminals. Even on my own campus, these images were having an impact. Increasing petty theft and fear of crime were the subject of conversations in the administration that I uncomfortably considered, in the absence of data, racist. Should we keep the large and visible gates locked in the after-school hours when the throngs of high school students waited for their buses? Two encounters between black adult males and white faculty women at or near the college increased the tension.

I didn't know those young people, the ones on the street or the ones in the news. But after a lifetime of anti-racist work as an activist and artist, I suspected that what I was seeing on the media was not the full picture. It was also clear that the increasing fear of youth crime throughout the Bay Area was related to race and ethnicity. Redevelopment efforts in the city center were felt by some to be thwarted by the identification of Oakland as a black, working-class city. Though unspoken, the visual dominance of African American and Latino youth waiting to change buses on the street corners of downtown Broadway, just as here at the college, was part of this formulation.

Chris Johnson, a good friend and colleague, agreed: we had no clue as to “who” these youth were, even though we were both teachers in the middle of Oakland, one of the most racially diverse cities in the nation. Johnson, a photographer, had been at the college longer than I had and was one of the few African Americans on the faculty. It wasn't until later in our friendship that I learned that he had a working-class upbringing on Bedford Stuyvesant's mean streets, the son of an abusive mother and a cop father. Johnson had walked out the door at sixteen when his dad pulled a gun on him and had lived on his own ever since. He was highly literate and self-educated and had lived an eventful life, playing music in the Village after leaving home and eventually migrating to the West Coast, where he fell in with the photographic group around Ansel Adams and Walker Evans. A large, handsome, dark skinned man of Jamaican descent with an intense intellectual curiosity and a global perspective, it sometimes appeared that he floated above the angers and humiliations of racism that were the lot of most black men in Oakland. Although racism was a part of his experience, he grew up in an era that framed black youth identity quite differently and in some real sense he had as little experience as I did of today's youth. It was a generation gap we shared with other California adults—we knew inner city youth primarily through the media.

I had grown up in a small farming town in the California's Great Central Valley—white, working-class, of European descent. Our schools were integrated ethnically and

socioeconomically, and my father encouraged my friendships with youth of other races. I learned about racism through several formative childhood experiences, my first contact with inequality. Later the Civil Rights Movement shaped my beliefs and launched my learning about systemic racism. As Johnson and I began our journey through the ten years of the Oakland Projects, we framed our process as personal and social research, but the outcomes, based on our values and politics, might end up being education, activism, service, or, as was my intention, art. The process was led by ethical inquiry from one stage to the next: at the center was an awareness of young people's social circumstances and a growing compassion for their plight as individuals and as a politically defined formation.

We entered the territory of a hostile social gaze, focusing on acts of perceiving and the politics of perception. An often-related experience from many youth we worked with went like this: A black teenaged boy is walking down a street and approaches a middle-aged white woman who involuntarily clutches her purse, maybe even crosses the street, as she hurries past him with her eyes averted. She is afraid and he is angry. Knowing they are often objects of a frightened, disapproving, and racially charged gaze, youth respond in public with aggressive boisterousness. But in private, as we heard over and over, it is the subject of derisive comments about the white adult world. And it hurts. One male youth spoke with frustrated helplessness:

If you start stereotyping people for a long time, they're going to start acting how you stereotype them—you know, "Oh, he's black. He robs, he kills. He do this, he do that. Well, if everybody's going to focus on that main point in my life, I might as well do it... I can't be accepted for who I am and for trying to change and for portraying a certain image because I'm black and I'm young. I'm 16 years old. I'm trying to make something of my life but nobody will help me. I've got to do it all by myself. [Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Augusto Boal, the South American playwright and director, observed the treatment of disadvantaged youth committed to a mental hospital in France: "I was surprised at the expressions in [the nurses'] faces which changed according to whom they were looking at. When their eyes met mine, they were polite but when they looked at a kid, they became authoritarian, severe, and tough." Speculating on the personal impact of this intimidating intimate gaze he suggested,

Let's assume that...I was taken for a sick person. How long would I have been able to stand it? ...I am not saying that these kids became sick because of the nurses....They...had their...alcoholic parents, poverty, overcrowded homes, dirty neighborhoods, drugs,

physical abuse... certainly [it was not] ... a simple gaze [that put them] where they were. But this way of looking at people struck me in a powerful way. [1988: 22]

In the streets in front of our college or in downtown Oakland, whose gaze had the power to determine someone's very identity? How did those looked upon experience the oppressive aspects of that gaze, and how did they reclaim power through theatrical display while they were being observed—flagrantly, loudly, expressively presenting themselves? The effects of these *lookings* at youth were not only personal; eventually the web of the gaze was implicated in the real territory of public policy. The relationship between *being looked at* and one's belief in personal options and ability to conceive of a positive future—*one's identity*—was central to the discourse of the Oakland Projects. We were activists, as artists, and we became more so as our work progressed. How we personally saw the Oakland youth in front of our college and the impact of media on our own attitudes as well as on public perception—the framing of images and the meanings implied—were the territory we began to explore. Johnson and I wanted to interrupt the framing, even our own, to understand a more politicized reality of being young in Oakland in 1991.

Teenage Living Room

Going to (Public) School

“They have no option because they didn't grow up in a home where they were taught to go to school and to get an education,” said a young man into a heavy discussion on drug dealing. Said a female companion, “If I had a choice of two boys—this one's a gangster and he has lots of money and cars, and this one's a college student who's still going to school—I would go with the college student because I know this other guy, he's not going to die in a couple days.” [Teenage Living Room video transcript, Box 2, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Starting from the micro-level of a single classroom at Oakland Technical High School, we launched a series of artistic inquiries that grew in scope and impact. Each project grew out of youth concerns expressed in the prior one, and each positioned youth in leadership roles and artists and community members in research and advocacy roles. “Recognizing the passivity inherent in media, we...stressed active participation.... Our approach [was] non-academic; you might say we were working from the inside out. We didn't plan to give definitions of popular culture, but to provide a framework for mutual investigation” (Lacy 1994c: 58).

We believed that if students learned to deconstruct their cultural surround, both as it played out in media and on the ground in their lives, they would be better positioned to critique the dominant media constructions of inner city youth. “For teenagers today, their development as human beings happens within a context of the media, and we have come together to pose a question with our students: Who is creating the definitions for your lives? Is this the ‘you’ that you know yourselves to be?” [Notes, Box 2, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

In a letter seeking funding we laid out our rationale: “Popular culture is one of the most important influences on teenage behavior and attitudes, yet teens are given little opportunity for guided examination of the mixed messages fed to them through the ‘cathode ray nipple’ (as coined by an Oakland rap group, the Disposable Heroes). Youth media-saturated reality coincides with a weakened family structure and a growing peer group accountability, and it is in this milieu that they must reconcile who they believe themselves to be. The media do not reflect reality, but redefine it using symbolic language and cues that can be easily understood and applied” [Letter, Box 2, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

We volunteered to teach a class at Oakland Technical High School, one of eight public high schools in Oakland, where the principal, Christine Darghari, wanted to partner with our nearby college. Although teachers’ already over-packed schedules limited their engagement, experimental projects with artists and activists were encouraged in the Oakland public schools, which had eliminated many arts programs. Throughout the Bay Area, partnerships between colleges and public schools were under much discussion at all grade levels.¹¹ Our college, however, had no such programs, so we were initially on our own time. Although difficult to implement given the conflicting schedules of the college and the high school, Principal Darghari freed up two high school teachers’ class responsibilities to allow us to construct a team-taught model class in media literacy to begin one afternoon a week in fall 1991. Together with Andy Hamner, English and drama teacher, and Lauren Manduke, dance teacher, we created a semester-long, once a week one-hour study block for 30 sophomores, about 15–16 years old.

¹¹ In the greater Bay Area themes in education were converging: service learning, after-school youth development type organizations, a move to return arts in K-12 schools, and multicultural and cross-cultural learning. Many local artists were involved in these discussions and some were developing after-school arts programs and youth development programs that used art-making strategies. The four of us teaching at Tech were invited to present our work at several local colleges, including the historic Culturally Inclusive Arts Education Conference at the San Francisco Arts Institute, developed by faculty Carlos Villa, who was leading SFAI students in work at Balboa Middle School in San Francisco.

We decided that our discussions would stress a relationship between how various forms of media portrayed youth and the issues they themselves faced in their daily lives. We were aware that young people in this school often did not have a place to talk about the intimate subjects that were so casually displayed in the media, and often their most vexing problems were handled alone or in conversations with equally young and misinformed friends. The course was designed around four general concepts or themes: (1) learning to look (students looking at their own positions as youth within a barrage of mediated images), (2) how are media made? (looking at local news reporting), (3) what do media teach? (learning rudimentary skills of media literacy analysis), and (4) making your own images (creating their own video news reports about the school).

The classes didn't always go smoothly. Even with four different teachers in the classroom, sometimes the 30 students proved to be difficult to manage without resorting to punitive attitudes. We were inventing our curriculum and trying it out for the first time. We had to learn to teach together, and students constantly tested the college teachers, who were used to a much different classroom experience. We had precious little time to communicate with the students in the hour-long classes that were constantly interrupted by loudspeaker messages from the head office. Not all students did their homework.

But many days we left the class euphoric, particularly after an exercise such as students representing themselves through photography and comparing it with youth representation on television. Manduke's journal notes reflect this enthusiasm:

Great class! Started out with a lot of talking but really turned out well.... Some of the student readings were very honest and revealing and the class was attentive and clapped for each student. The photos of students taken by Chris were a big hit. Everyone wanted to see each other's photo.... The talk that followed was focused, students listening to others vent about parents, friends, etc. It made me realize the need for these kids to have someone to talk to. I KNOW it was a good class since the next day a student from the class came up to me and said, "What are we doing next week Miss Manduke?" The fact that a student cared enough to ask is a big deal! [Journal, Box 2, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Students were particularly interested in how teenage violence was covered in local newspapers. In one class discussion, one student, Robert Turner, noted: "I realized how the media exaggerates and kind of puts a little extra into a situation to make things seem more serious than they are. Like the boy that got shot in front of the school, he was not really hurt but they made

him cover his face so it would look like he was dead” [Student report, Box 2, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

According to our evaluations, students particularly enjoyed the opportunity to make responses through art practices, such as videotaping—a practice we developed here and carried on through the rest of the decade. Later we saw our role as supporting other non-profits in the development of a public voice for youth,¹² but in this first class of the project we wondered how students would respond to the critiques that we ourselves had of their representation in the media. The overriding concern students expressed was their alienation from the adult world in its many forms: parents, teachers, police, and so on. As student Mara Lasan put it: “I enjoyed the videotaping of our newscasts because for once (that I’ve seen)—the media was made up of us. It was our chance to tell who we really are....The media is mostly made up of adults. How are adults supposed to know how we feel and what’s going on in our lives unless they ask us? And the media doesn’t really do that enough” [Student report, Box 2, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

During the next semester Hamner continued the project within his English and drama classroom, focusing on ethics, and Johnson, Manduke, and I supplemented this with presentations to the students. We planned a small performance for these students and their friends that would take place at the end of their school year. Students’ deep need to be heard and to talk about and evaluate their personal experiences prompted us to consider how to frame a conversation of trust within the classroom, addressing, in particular, issues that were also present in news and entertainment media, like sexuality, families, violence, and so on. At the end of our second semester of classes at Oakland Tech, we decided to experiment with a small-scale performance, which became known as the *Teenage Living Room*.

Performing Listening

“There are rumors that Oakland kids can’t learn...” said Crawford, as his pal Louvenna Gary, 15, interjected: “the media thinks we’re hard-headed that we’re always in gangs or out having babies.” “They view us as thugs and tyrants,” said Danilo Donoso, 18. “But we’re not a bunch

¹² One of the most important models for this work was the nearby Youth Radio program of KPFA, and some of the students who joined us in the next semester were trained there. We partnered with them and one of their producers, Weyland Southen, to tape-record scores of youth in small conversation groups with each other and produce a soundtrack used for an installation in *The Roof Is On Fire* performance and broadcast on KPFA. Founded as Youth News in 1979 by Louis Freedberg, a South African anthropologist who was doing fieldwork at Berkeley High School, Youth Radio evolved into a sophisticated multicultural broadcast training, media advocacy, and violence prevention program. It is widely regarded as the best and earliest youth news organization.

of barbarians. We're people who want to be treated with respect." [Media report, Box 8, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The setting was the same street corner where Tech students gathered in front of our college waiting for the bus, just before noon on a bright spring day in May 1992. Johnson and I and some of our college students had cleared faculty cars out of the triangular fenced-in parking lot. I'd hauled a ten-foot ladder to the side of the lot so that by standing on top I could see the shapes formed by the cars as they were parked and re-parked. Once they were arranged as if they had converged upon a meeting point, stopping momentarily for a conversation between passengers, it seemed to work. Not much about the time of day with its high overhead sun, the random assortment of cars, or the asphalt lot was particularly aesthetic as tableaux go, but that was not the aim: we were creating a prototype for a future performance.

For the first time we deliberately brought the high school students off their campus and onto our college campus. This gesture was not without controversy from conservative factions of the college who worried that our action was an invitation to increased theft. The idea that our Oakland Tech students would become "out of control" was a stereotype we confronted throughout our work in Oakland. Only one month after the post-Rodney King verdict riots in Los Angeles, our simple performance would attract complaints from nearby residents and broader media attention than we'd anticipated.

Manduke, Johnson, and I planned the performance with Hamner's students, building on the conversations they'd had all semester. An important part of this preparation consisted of designing the questions they would address during the performance. They settled on eight topics—power, cars, sex, friends, family, violence, money, and media. The idea was that a group of three to five students would inhabit a single car and choose up to four of these topics to address in an hour-long improvisational conversation. We role-played the performance, selected partners, and discussed what themes were of most interest to them. From their experience in our classes, the students were quite aware of the relevance of the performance to the way they were portrayed in local media.

The students arrived with Hamner and Manduke, and after we finally got them divided into their cars, we started the two-hour "action" with a visual self-presentation by each group. During this first hour no audience was present; it was a protective time when students were asked to consider with each other how they wanted to represent their car for a portrait by a large-format view cameras. Large-format photography is a cumbersome studio process, like having a senior portrait taken. Students gravely discussed or raucously argued about the possibilities, aware that

in this rare instance they were choosing the image. I still see these portraits, taken by Johnson and his photography students while the high school students joked, jostled, and debated exactly how the group should perform themselves—inside or leaning on their cars, solemn or smiling, touching or not. The young men were at once vulnerable and cocksure as they posed with the cars, the likes of which it would probably be years before they owned. Then students hopped into their cars, shuffled through their cue cards, and it was time for the gathering audience to enter the parking lot.

The teens dropped the self-conscious stances they'd adopted in front of the large-format cameras. They revealed themselves, their feelings and ideas about the complex world they inhabit. This was their opportunity to "write the script" for the camera and the audience, and we were all surprised at how honest and moving their script really was. The students talked their hearts out, and we were amazed at how quickly they focused on the task at hand, how earnestly they took their image generation.

Media attention to this small project came as a complete surprise, and the unfolding story was told most strikingly through the eyes of several sympathetic reporters:

This was performance art of the confrontational kind.... In this combination boudoir, nightclub and therapist's couch, the students were "kickin' it places (discussing things)," explained 15-year-old Tameshia Fulghan. On their own turn, these teens challenged media and how it portrays them.

In a white Toyota station wagon on the far side of the lot, fourteen-year-old Robert Turner and Walter Duncan, age fifteen, were leaning over the front seat and doing their earnest best to talk fourteen-year-old Joshua Sanderford in the back into buying in to the American dream by being honest, avoiding drug dealing, staying in high school and studying hard, getting a scholarship to college, obeying authority figures, and accepting injustice and police brutality along the way as an unpleasant but inevitable fact of life. Josh was having absolutely none of it. "I ain't going to accept what society has to say," Josh said firmly. That's like saying if you was still a slave right now, you just got to learn to accept that you just a slave." "What can you do about it?" Walter says practically, spreading his hand and shrugging. "You can't do nothing about it." "Yes you can," Joshua says. "You can protest."

Meanwhile, two girls speculated about how they'd react to being threatened with a gun: "I'm going to try and talk them out of it; give them reasons why they shouldn't shoot me," said one. Her friend disagreed: "No, I'm not gonna talk them out of it. If they shoot me, I'll

know it's God pulling me, that I'm going someplace better—where there is no racism," she said.

An hour later, when the performance ended, most of the audience lingered on, trying to come to terms with the unexpected emotional impact of the piece. Several had been reduced to tears ... one CCAC [college] student turned to another, shaking her head in wonder, and said 'Did you believe that? That was totally mind-blowing! I never expected anything like this.'... The setup ... created a bizarre sense of hyper-reality that heightened the impact. The teens demonstrated an uncanny ability to completely ignore the voyeurs peeping in the side windows or propping cameras on the cars' hoods.

When a CCAC student monitor opened the Volvo's door to signal the end, those of us standing outside glared at her. The teens poured out of their cars and started dancing jubilantly around the parking lot and laughing and talking and crowding around the Channel 4 cameraman to ask him when the segment would air. Next year Lacy hopes to offer the media course in all of the Oakland high schools and stage a year-end performance piece with about 300 students. A good argument could be made for including school administrators, politicians, police officers and city officials in the audience the next time around. The students' goal was to break down some common stereotypes about inner city youth and force the media to perceive them as individuals. They succeeded. [Multiple media reports, Box 8, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

That seemed to be the consensus for reporters and stage producers alike. The most revelatory learning for all of us who witnessed the students talking was just how compelling, engaging, and moving the students were as they—quite simply—talked to each other. Their heartbreakingly honest self-portrayals were the aesthetic moment of an otherwise remarkably ordinary event. Although I'd been working with this multi-vocal tableau form for years, this was the first time I'd worked with teenagers. Trusting this aesthetic of self-revelation and its value as both art and advocacy was consistently justified in our projects going forward.

After volunteering for a year at Tech and becoming familiar with the campus and its vast student body I noticed a shift in my perceptions. As crowds of youth walked by me on the street, no longer was I looking at the gray hooded sweatshirts and flashy hoop earrings. Instead I noticed I was peering inside the hoods: Was it one of the students from our class?¹³ Who was it

¹³ Similarly, after a year of working as an artist with police officers (later in the Oakland Projects), long enough to know several by name, I noticed another shift. Whereas earlier I would perceptually register a black-and-white police

that was wearing those earrings? Was that a familiar face? My looking was refined and individuated by intimacy.

The Roof Is On Fire and Perceptions of Oakland Youth

The fact is, teenagers are a direct reflection of what our society is. In a sense, teenagers are like the canary in the mineshaft. We can see in the way teenagers react to culture whether we are creating a healthy culture—so we have to listen to what they think and what they feel.... I think listening is, in itself, a profoundly revolutionary act. Just listen. Don't talk.

[Chris Johnson, Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The public high school students we'd worked with had shown an uncanny ability to “perform” themselves in public in ways that were more powerful than any scripted dialogue. They were smart, articulate, and motivated to correct the public record. We decided to expand our model to engage the entire district, beginning as before with a series of classroom conversations in the city's public high schools and finishing with a massive public discussion in the form of a performance in the center of Oakland. While the entry point into these conversations was popular culture and media literacy, the subject was not media per se, but a complex mixture of identity, representation, and, ultimately, values. It was comprised of media politics and advocacy, as well as youth development.

Building a Team

Joining forces with Chris Johnson, Lauren Manduke, and me, to plan our next endeavor was Annice Jacoby, who had volunteered to help us with *Teenage Living Room*, producing the press releases and managing the media for that event. A petite, dark-haired, energetic and intellectually intense Jewish woman, originally from New York, Jacoby had worked in theater, literature, and poetry. Besides being a keen dramaturge, she wrote beautifully and was a brilliant media strategist. Over the next few years both she and Johnson would work in various capacities on the Oakland Projects. Although their roles varied in intensity in different projects, both Jacoby and Johnson, with their passion and vision, were central in the formation of these works, as were the contributions of other artists and the youth we worked with, such as Jacques Bronson, Danielle Herman, Leuckessia Spencer Hirsh, and Unique Holland.

car by the pattern of its color, calling forth a furtive reexamination of my recent actions, now the black-and-white's appearance was a signal to peer into the window in an attempt to recognize and identify its occupants.

Our search to contextualize our work as art with a purpose, art that sought institutional and systemic change, led us to people in urban planning, youth development, education, crime prevention, and civic policies. A key organizational participant was Oakland Sharing the Vision, a non-profit organization, led by Steve Costa, to support the development of a strategic plan for the City of Oakland. (In time, I became the officially designated “artist in residence” at OSV, a way of solidifying my relationship to the city planning process.) Each person who volunteered or consulted on the early development of the Oakland Projects—including Eric Tam, a marketing and computer business person; Flo Wong, trustee emeritus from the de Young Museum; Councilwoman Sheila Jordan; Mayor Elihu Harris; and several teachers and artists—seemed primarily motivated by a genuine concern for the young people and the struggles they faced alone:

“My Mom, I lived with her two years and she was just, she was totally messed up. I had to take care of my little brother. I mean, I did everything. I had to miss school to take care of him. She used to wake me up two, three o’clock in the morning send me around the corner to buy her some Pepsi. I was like six years old. I did not know how to cook. I used to FRY [rather than boil] the top ramen.” The two girls in a pick-up truck dissolved into a fit of giggles.

“I feel safe in the family I’m in. I didn’t feel safe at first—not that they were going to hit me or anything, not that kind of safety, but I didn’t feel like I was going to stay in that family for long,” said a somber young man. [Media reports, Box 8, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

At Jacoby’s urging we developed an organizational identity, TEAM (Teens + Education + Art + Media), with a letterhead and a well-prepared media packet. Our literature described TEAM as “a group of Bay Area artists, educators and concerned citizens. We have met regularly for over a year, inspired by a performance by Oakland Technical school students. We are unified in our concerns for Oakland’s youth and, in particular, the way in which inner city teens are stereotyped by mass media. We question whether the media is sending out accurate images of teen’s lives. Are our youth being unduly influenced by these media images as they struggle to form their identities?” [Published literature, Box 3, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

We were not a non-profit, although in many senses we looked and acted like one. Some people were more interested than others in actually founding an organization. I weighed the alternatives: the creation of a recognizable entity for purposes of funding and identity and carry-over from project to project, versus the flexibility of operating as singular, if sequential, art projects. In the end, the substantial and influential partnerships we created sufficed for many of

these purposes, and we used OSV as our fiscal partner as needed. As the chief producer and administrator for all the projects, I felt it was important not to become a bureaucracy, with me as the executive director of a non-profit organization. This had to do with my primary identity as a visual artist. Looking back over the trajectory and scale of our work for ten years, we did operate as a small and successful non-profit organization, but we were more of a project-driven producing agency. Between each project we developed partnerships, wrote media and planning documents, and fund-raised for the next one. Our projects flowed together into an entity of sorts, although we were known by our key performance events.

We knew that our one unifying principle was we all wanted to change public perception, practices, and policy regarding deep and systemic prejudices toward youth. At first we only intuited the link between art production, community service, teacher engagement, and media literacy. Media literacy was a way into both the personal aspects of the work, largely educational in nature for the young people we worked with, and the political environment that circumscribed youth. Soon a more intensive examination, one that involved research into the institutions that constituted significant forces in our youth's lives and a developing literature of youth culture, taught us about the deep injustice of society's treatment of young people, particularly poor youth of color. We formulated our presentations in terms of a larger context of class and race politics—looking, for instance, at youth/police street encounters in terms of the prison reform movement. The need to fund-raise on a national scale, to communicate to policy makers and institutional executives, and to take our place within the extensive youth development activity of Oakland forced us to continually articulate the growth process that we, as individuals and researchers, experienced. Over time we developed an articulation that more carefully defined our targets, not exclusively in education or youth development (although engaging with these), but using these strategies as one part of an initiative to engage a broad public conversation in issues concerning youth. In our communications, we tried to describe for a variety of audiences how art might operate on a civic level in support of direct political action:

TEAM's projects focus on direct engagement with youth and with policies and services that affect them, primarily in Oakland, California. Our art projects are "public hearings" that affect how people view youth and their needs. We work with youth, artists, policy makers, and educators in the justice, health, and education systems to influence opinion and create changes in those systems. Our intent is to create a community-wide "conversation," where the language is art by and on behalf of youth. We document and distribute our work on television, through public lectures, on videotape, and in articles and books. [Published literature, Box 3, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Our language had to clarify what we were doing, and why, to literally hundreds of people from all walks of life. Police officers and public health officials understood one language, funders and media another, and youth yet another. (It was the youth who kept us honest.) This was the beginning of the decade, but already themes were clear: schools had declined and prisons boomed; youth were vilified and activism challenged those portrayals. We defined TEAM as an arts-in-community organization working in four primary areas that deeply affect youth wellbeing: city and county government, local criminal justice (including policing and probation), public schools, and public health.

The public schools in Oakland seemed a natural place for us to begin our expanded project. Through OSV, we approached the Oakland Unified School District to develop a partnership. Our strategy in seeking partnerships was relatively similar, irrespective of the formality of the situation or the organization we approached. We introduced our observations, questions, and developing understanding of youth in the region, seeking points where our interests might intersect. How could we, as artists, develop artworks while supporting youth in developmental activities and serving an identified need as presented by potential partnering organizations? In our methodology we looked for places where art could add value, partners who would strengthen our developing analysis, and institutions, like OUSD, who had a direct relationship to youth wellbeing.

Our initial proposal to OUSD involved a series of media literacy workshops for high school teachers, taught by national scholars and educators and leading up to a performance. Alice Kawazoe, who worked in the district office and was in charge of teacher training, thought that this idea would fit into her purview of providing advanced training for teachers, and our proposed workshops became an official OUSD faculty development activity. Kawazoe identified 50 or 70 teachers, to whom we advertised our workshops, and she served on a selection panel for applicants. Teachers were paid for their time to attend our workshop in after-school hours.

In September 1993, after selecting 15 participants, we began the roundtable discussions with volunteer guest speakers for the workshop—all experts in sociology, education, art, and media.¹⁴ Faculty from all the major public high schools—Fremont, Castlemont, Oakland, Oakland Technical, Skyline, and McClymonds—as well as the smaller Far West Art Academy

¹⁴ The workshop curriculum was organized by Chris Johnson who was assisted by Lauren Manduke. Manduke had just finished a Masters degree focusing on our project. We held the evening classes every two weeks in the faculty lounge of our college.

and two alternative high schools—Dewey and Street Academy—participated in the workshops. The speakers, in the order of their presentations, were:

- *Kathleen Tyner, founding director of Strategies for Media Literacy and research associate at Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. She discussed why media literacy has become a critical theme in modern education. What are the key issues at work in media literacy approaches? What resources are available to educators?*
- *Richard Bolton, associate professor at UC Santa Barbara and editor of The Contest of Meaning. He looked at marketing and advertising, the engines that drive our consumer-oriented economy. As the methods and strategies of advertising become more sophisticated, seductive and ubiquitous, it is increasingly important that we understand these dynamics and develop skills to counter the influences of persuasion.*
- *Janette Gitler, television producer for KRON-TV. She examined the forces at work behind the selection and reporting of the news and its relationship to an informed citizenry on which democracy relies.*
- *Herb Kohl, author of 36 Children, The Open Classroom, and many other books on education. He considered the complexity of the problems confronting educators. He argued that many of the basic assumptions and approaches to public education in America are in need of reform and advocated for progressive pedagogical ideas meet these challenges.*
- *Todd Gitlin, sociologist, author of Inside Prime Time, and editor of Watching Television. He discussed the blurring of lines between reality and illusion because what we know about ourselves and the world is mediated by the image-makers of popular culture, advertising and news sources. Who is served by the media and how are young people affected? What can educators do to help students become effective consumers of media?*
- *Sydney Carson, director of Nightletter Theater and humanities professor at California College of the Arts. He covered gender issues, including neofeminism, the men's movement, and the extension of gay and lesbian rights, as well as how the bombardment of media-generated stereotypes shapes our views.*

- *Troy Duster, sociologist and author of Backdoor to Eugenics. He looked at racial polarization and how racial projections of the news media and advertising shape public opinion and attitudes. What effect do stereotypes in popular culture have on race relations and the shaping of identity?*

In the two weeks between each presentation, the teachers would work with their students in some form of exercise that reflected what they'd learned from the seminar. At the seminars, teachers reported on their in-class activities and study blocks. The workshop provided an opportunity for faculty from each high school to develop new approaches to their classroom subjects and new tools for communicating contemporary issues to their students.

In a simple two-part exercise, Madeline Pyeatt [one of the teachers] introduced media literacy to her students by asking them to cut out paper figures and to inscribe them with words that stereotype teenagers. The students listed words such as “in gangs, thieves, in jail before 18, baggy clothes, no good, disrespectful, alcoholics, rude punks, insensitive, peace destroyers, immature, macho, uneducated, illiterate or close to it, loves to have sex, senseless, dumb, have many children, violent, stupid beliefs, sells drugs, drop out, wears a beeper.” For the second part of the exercise, Pyeatt asked the students to cut out another figure and to inscribe it with words that represent how they perceive themselves. The students listed “respectable, smart, caring, trustworthy, sensitive, honest, interested in school, reliable, strong, friendly, nice temperament, non ignorant, lovable, peaceful, helpful, cautious, safe, good.” It is apparent from the responses in part one of the exercise that the students clearly understand and resent the negative ways in which they are depicted by the mass media. [Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

At the end of the workshops, the lesson plans were presented to the school district, along with our written recommendations for a curriculum in media literacy. We also started planning a public event for the end of the school year—what would become *The Roof Is On Fire*. I was set on doing a performance artwork, one on a larger and more theatrical scale than *Teenage Living Room*, which I thought of as a “sketch.” We promised our growing list of partners:

This massive public performance will showcase the realities of Oakland teenagers—their attitudes, questions and desires. The event will be an opportunity for participating students to represent themselves in a media project based upon their own lives. The making of this event will teach students new skills in video production, sound, writing, and organization, introduce them to new career opportunities, and increase their communication skills, self-

confidence, and self-esteem. ...The teens will take us to the place that best illustrates the transient quality of this stage of their lives. Throughout one long evening in one of their favorite haunts, students will explore power, sex, etc. in a combination of improvisation and stylized ritual. Powerful social questions are examined unrestrictedly while and audience, invited through mass media attention, is given contextual permission to “eavesdrop.”

[Notes, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

In January 1994 we began to work with several volunteer faculty members from the fall semester workshop, each one responsible for recruiting and supervising the 40 student leaders who would constitute our youth planning team. These students and their sponsoring faculty members met after school every two weeks over four months at the Oakland Technical High School library. TEAM production people and steering committee members attended some of these meetings, and of course I attended all of them to work with the students directly on performance design.

During the off-weeks various committees of faculty, volunteers, and artists would meet to plan the project coordination (find office space, develop filing system, set up checking account, meet with other teams to schedule tasks, develop advisory group, and so on); public relations (obtain donated design and printing services, develop a press plan); production (performance site, insurance, sound design, finding cars, donations, food, volunteers); community outreach (endorsements, speakers, audience development, more donations); and fund-raising. It all made sense conceptually; the trick was in implementing the design with scarce funding and almost all of us working as volunteers in addition to full-time jobs.

We'd agreed that at each participating school, the individual faculty would develop their own media literacy project and TEAM members would help them realize it. In other words, each school would generate both student leaders and general participants for the final performance. In an example of her creative media savvy, Annice Jacoby lined up a documentary commitment from KRON, the local NBC affiliate, to videotape the schools' media literacy projects. KRON's coverage of the final performance would focus on the youth participation and perspective.

Making the Performance

How does a massive and collaborative performance become realized? In January I'd begun to present my image of a parking lot performance, which was clarified with each conversation and revised several times over the next few months. Initially I imagined:

On a hot Indian summer evening in the fall, just after Labor Day, Oakland's teenagers cruise Broadway, the boulevard that runs through the center of the city. In the long twilight, cars begin arriving to a large used car lot that borders the boulevard, where other cars are already assembled. Strings of light bulbs, floating balloons and colored flags form a fluttering border. [Notes, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

My image was a way of generating collective imagination. The words of the description were not meant to be literal, but to evoke a response in participants' imaginations. The details of the image changed, slowly and inexorably, as we moved through the process of locating the production and grounding it in the realities of what was possible.

It is not difficult to collaborate with a small group of like-minded artists. Chris Johnson, Annice Jacoby, and I were the central artists on the project, but because of its scale and the rapidly expanding collaborators, which included students, teachers, and other artists, we divided into teams, each with its own set of responsibilities. As a result, I know more about the details of production planning than my other two collaborators, although we shared information closely, and they each know more about the part of the project they headed up. Johnson was constitutionally predisposed to lead the educational part of the project. A charismatic teacher himself, he was deeply interested in the way the teachers and the scholar advisors interconnected around media literacy and classroom experience. Jacoby, eventually on contract at KRON to work on the video production, managed to juggle frequent and sustained advice on theatrical issues, based on her background in theater production, with the requirements of managing an hour-long television special and a very effective public relations campaign. This included crafting the message at every level, from working with the graphic designer Michael Manwaring on poster production to overseeing printing, press kits and media releases. Together, the three of us were looked to for conceptualizing and speaking for the project, and we were never more completely co-authors than we were with this piece.

As collaborative input is welcomed and grows in scale, difficulties arise based on different levels of knowledge and perspectives. The image of parked cars had been settled for me and my TEAM associates since we produced *Teenage Living Room* (a performance I felt was aesthetically unsatisfying) and I was intent on producing it "right." One evening a new group of students came into the planning process, and although they were down with the conversation aspect, a few dominant voices questioned the car image. They didn't have cars and wanted to hold these conversations where they really took place—in their rooms at home or in public parks.

We considered alternate images heatedly over the course of two or three weeks. It was painful to deal with what I felt were legitimate political—though not aesthetic—objections. Indeed, though the cars provided a distinctive and protected “fourth wall” for the student conversations, as well as metaphoric richness about travel and the transition from childhood to adulthood, most Oakland teenagers didn’t own them. The disagreement also led into an important conversation about the limits of youth autonomy in this massive production, a question visited and revisited throughout our work.

In the end, I couldn’t come up with another image that satisfied me, and I was clear that there was a line between doing this work as art and doing it as a youth art education activity. While trying to creatively merge the two, by spending inordinate resources and time to make the production process transparent and pedagogically beneficial to the young people with whom we worked, I made the painful decision that I could only work on an image I believed would faithfully carry both my aesthetic and my political intentions. A graffiti-covered bus parked in the center of a parking lot of cars (one of the many images presented as a compromise image) didn’t do it for me. Finally, during a production meeting where adults were again arguing about this, Brandy Thomas spoke up in her droll, observational and mature-mother-at-16 manner, “Why don’t you adults just stop arguing? The lady is obviously intent on cars, and that’s not why we are doing this anyway, so why don’t we just do cars and move on?” provoking general adult embarrassment, laughter and, on my part, a deep gratitude. [Journal entry, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Throughout the art-creation process, the youth planning team often lifted our spirits. Each meeting we planned to present a different aspect of the performance for the deliberation of the forty or so who made the semester-long commitment to be leaders. Our plan for the student planning group was for them to explore topics, participate in videotaping and tape recording conversations, apprentice to various aspects of the performance production and press communication, and make key decisions, such as what would be discussed and how student groups would be formulated. They would also plan a cross-school forum and recruit on each campus. By May, we assumed we’d be rehearsing for the final performance and finalizing questions.

Within the larger group, a smaller group of about eight or so, mostly from nearby Oakland Tech, became a core decision-making group, visiting sites, speaking to the press, and debating questions about the questions. They were smart kids, natural leaders, disadvantaged in many ways but definitely college bound based on their abilities. While youth on the larger planning team participated in school-site media literacy activities that were featured in the documentary,

offered input during the planning process, participated in the sound documentary, and were performers in the performance, it was these core leaders to whom we offered mentorship in the making of a production. Different youth were able to work with sound, with the KRON documentary, in media communications, stage design, and so on.

There were many aesthetic decisions to make after we'd agreed that cars on a rooftop would serve as a platform for the conversations: timing, the movement of audience through the space, the sound installation on the sixth floor, the role of youth leaders, the way to end the performance, and so on. The performance slowly materialized, becoming more real with every decision. Over the course of the spring semester many things shifted as we negotiated between various competing interests, limitations, and opportunities. We rejected unpromising directions we'd started, changed directions, and invented new solutions. A characteristic of this type of work is how much energy goes into constructing its context: putting out feelers, assessing emergent needs, meeting new people, pursuing shared interests, and creatively positioning the work. It was detailed, intensive work—imagine a large web of social fabric that was constantly being tested and shaped by (eventually) hundreds of hands. The best we could offer when the inevitable differences of opinion arose, with such a disparate group—at one point there were over 100 people (students, teachers, volunteers, leaders from participating organizations and politicians, college students, recruiters, stage people, and artists) working intensely on the performance—was that we would be transparent and would discuss the aesthetic, ethical, and political implications of, all disagreements. It was tough, and it was imperfect, as an art-making process.

Many uncertainties, not the least money and weather, hung in the balance. Contingency planning is the name of the game for this kind of work. I had already produced many major public performances, and this was not as large as some. But here, as never before, moving forward was contingent on cross-race, class, and generational understandings and allegiances. We made go/no go plans, establishing dates by which certain things had to be confirmed or we would move or change the production. We identified key elements in the plan that required answers before we could set a date or secure a site. Could we get enough money for performance necessities (the variables were people's stipends, but some things like insurance needed specific funding to move forward)? How do we meaningfully keep our youth teams and faculty engaged, keeping our commitment to youth development as a part of the work?

In January, as we started planning, developing a soundtrack to accompany the performance seemed imperative for both technical and pedagogic reasons. On the technical side, we weren't sure how many audience members would be able to actually see or hear the conversations in the

cars. It might be possible that we'd need to restrict the flow of the audience, depending on issues of production scale. We wondered if the cars would need to have an omni-directional microphone inside, with an external speaker outside each car, to project the students' voices for an audience. We knew the cars would serve as mini-stages, protecting the youth inside and providing a metaphoric theatrical "fourth wall," but we didn't know how the relationship to listening space and possible numbers in the audience would work out, nor did we know how close audience would get to the cars. We also didn't realize at the time what incredible performers the students would be.

Pedagogically, we wanted to continue to develop meaningful ways our expanded planning team of 40 or so young people could contribute to the performance production. Not all of them were or wanted to be artists—those tended to move toward the core group—but self-expression and empowerment were important goals for all our student planning team members. We constructed an hour-long soundtrack as a sound accompaniment to the performance, working with Barbara McBain, an experienced professional sound designer, and Weyland Southen, a young man who was just developing a reputation at Pacifica radio (KPFA) as a producer and was closer in age and aesthetics to the young people. They proposed an "audio component to support the physical theme of the performance itself: a car-ride through Oakland. This might take the form of a journey that transits several neighborhoods. Students would help collect the sounds—both specific and ambient—that typify their neighborhoods. They would also choose or compose the music" [Notes, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

We apportioned a good chunk of our meager budget to the development of the soundtrack to serve as a soundscape coming out of cars as people walked up the garage ramps to the performance on the roof. It was broadcast all or in part on several radio stations. Southen secured KPFA sound studios, and we brought several groups of students there over four separate evening sessions to tape-record their conversations around subjects they were working on for the performance: sex, race, media, violence school, family, money, and media. One of the most memorable conversations was between a group of students we'd invited from an Oakland private school and the public school students with whom we'd been working.

One of the roles for our student planning group was to inform and recruit peers at their school sites. At our bi-weekly meetings students took the lead in designing questions, trying out performance strategies, and discussing the composition of students they sought according to ethnicity, age, and schools. Michael Jackson, faculty from the media academy at Fremont High School, drafted a recruitment schema on his computer and we passed it out. Students took turns

leading the discussions and we spent time in-between coaching them through their various stages of upset and fear around leadership.

Eight high schools were represented in the student planning group. Each school was represented by one or more faculty, and most had at least two student team leaders. Faculty were the built-in support system for students on the planning group; we knew that our planning team of artists couldn't support each and every member of the forty and didn't want their participation in the total project to be without emotional and intellectual oversight. This way, if issues came up that students needed to work through, the faculty member from their school who nominated them, and attended meetings at Oakland Tech with them, would be available.

Students made decisions about the languages that would be represented, and after reviewing the ethnic composition of OUSD high schools (at the time 55.1% black, 4.5% white, 18.8% Hispanic, 20.5% Asian, 0.3% Native American, and 0.8% other) they aimed for representations that would match these figures, in equal numbers of males and females. In the beginning, though, they were scrambling for anyone. On May 5th we received this note from the student group working under Michael Jackson at Fremont High School:

We as students of Fremont High School passed out fliers with a sign in sheet. We gave them to the responsible teachers. For the first week we only received a few names. Hopefully the number of students will increase in the weeks ahead. Hear [sic] are the names. [And they listed eight students with phone numbers.] [Letter, Box 3, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Students developed the questions that would be distributed on individual 3 x 5 cards, four to each car, before the performance. Youth led brainstorming sessions and created large lists that were categorized and pared down in large and small group processes. The youth production team vetted the final list, meeting over one weekend afternoon in early May over the president's conference table at the college. In general Johnson and I supervised the process and let the youth make all the decisions, but we exercised our veto power once when a question about homosexuality was worded in a deeply prejudicial fashion and the young men and women had a heated debate about prejudice. After careful consideration and many revisions, they came up with the list used for the performance. Each car would select four topics from the list, and the questions would guide, not regulate or restrict, their conversations. Some of the questions included: On sex, why is there a double standard for men and women when it comes to sex? On violence, why/how do people in positions of authority sometimes misuse their power? On media, why does the media represent some music in a negative way? (For full list of questions generated by student leaders, see online appendix.)

As this was a school-sponsored and visibly public event, we had to send parental letters out, asking for permission for participation, photography, and videotaping for minor students. We explained the nature of the event and its purpose in our letter to the parents, inviting the parents and family, and assuring that we were providing transportation and other safety measures. “We want you to know that every effort is being made to make this evening enjoyable, safe, wholesome, entertaining and educational for your teenager and the audience. Several of their teachers will be on hand. . . your teenager will be provided with breakfast during the rehearsal and dinner during the performance.”

By April we’d completely outgrown the temporary name—*Teenage Living Room*—one I was never fond of anyway. We teased it around at our increasingly intense and sometimes madcap production meetings (with Jacques and Stephanie making up hysterically funny rap songs). Jacques offered the popular chant of black house parties, “The Roof Is On Fire”:

*The roof,
The roof,
The roof is on fire
We don't need no water,
Let the motherfucker burn!
Burn, motherfucker, burn!*

But that was “old school” for our core student planners, who fell in love with the title “Shut Up and Listen.” Jacoby, as media director, had the final say. In her opinion, although we all liked “Shut Up” as a title, it was more likely to alienate than attract an audience. The compromise was that we would use “Shut Up and Listen” as the subtitle on all media alerts. On the night of the performance the youth leaders wore badges urging just that and had to defend the slogan to Mayor Elihu Harris in a televised media interview before the event. Throughout the performance, as predicted, the occasional problems we had to deal with were precisely from those audience members who seemed to have a very hard time just listening to young people talk.

Finding a Site

I had always imagined that the performance site would be a used car lot on Broadway on a late spring or early fall night. During the day these lots were not very attractive, but I carried the image from my own cruising days in high school: broad flatlands, wide generous roads cutting

through the middle of town, carnival-like shiny streamers and lots of lights, enough to give the appearance of a more attractive and forgiving version of daytime car lots. Throughout California, people shop for cars at night in the heat of summer.

We began with the City of Oakland Department of Cultural Affairs, Chamber of Commerce, and the special events staff in Oakland City Marketing. We knew this would be an unusual request, and everywhere we went we ran into people, black as well as white, who were nervous about getting so many public school students together in one place. For car merchants, there would not only be liability issues about the use of their property for a public event, with hundreds if not thousands of people, but the specter of teens sitting in car and leaving gum under the seats and potato chips or worse in the glove compartments. The event could potentially interfere with, rather than support, their business activity. Of course, we would pitch it to them as a support to their presence through advertising and an opportunity to participate in a civic event. To enforce that notion, and override a general fear of teenagers damaging their cars, we needed political support. This is why we had our letters of endorsement at the ready and why we continued to build political endorsement of civic leaders like Councilwoman Sheila Jordan.

Working with City Hall opened up a host of opportunities, ones we continued to build on during the Oakland Projects, connections that gave us tremendous access to many sectors of the city and county government. Our initial foray into city politics was facilitated by Mary Anne Hedderson, the director of cultural affairs for the City of Oakland, who approached the Oakland Convention Center, the Oakland City marketing division, and the Chamber of Commerce (who informed us that advertising the presence so many Oakland youth—the numbers of participants in the performance was growing as recruitment spread—downtown at night was exactly the image they were trying to discourage!).

On Sundays in late March, artist and volunteer Gail Smithwalter and I, often accompanied by one or two young people from the production team, would drive around looking at possible sites. We perused vacant lots, parking lots, and used car lots, as well as parking areas at hospitals, the YMCA, subway stations, and Jack London Square in the port area. Armed with letters of endorsement, we dropped by car showrooms looking for sympathetic managers who would appear intrigued rather than terrified as we explained the project.

In April time was running out, and I updated Hedderson:

I have contacted Bill Cox Jr. (Cadillac Used Cars) and he will meet with us after I return, depending on the fate of that entire block, which apparently is for sale. Because of this, we have started investigating alternative spaces and have come up with the following: (1) the top of the parking lot over the Oakland Convention Center, which is owned by the City of Oakland....(2) the top of the parking lot at “The Parking Place” near J. London Square...(3) Honda of Oakland on Broadway (owned by the Hendrick Automotive Group). We are especially interested in pursuing the convention center parking lot and feel that the view, location and inherent theatricality of the top level would add drama to our event.

[Letter, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

At the City Center across from City Hall, the marketing manager of my health club (the site of a subsequent performance) suggested that we get in touch with the Bramalea development corporation that leased much of the space in the downtown area. They suggested the newly constructed and under-used City Center parking garage, as they were interested in attracting customers for their parking, particularly in the evening.

Not long before sunset on a warm April evening, when the youth production team and three adults—Eric Tam, Chris Johnson, and I—were working together at the college, we decided to check it out. We piled into our cars and set off downtown to meet the KRON cameraman, Craig Franklin, on the garage’s rooftop. We raced a bit recklessly up the empty six floors of the garage, competing to see who could get to the top first, and then our cars were suddenly ejected onto the expanse of the rooftop, the seventh floor, with a breathtaking view of the sun setting over the Bay Bridge. Lights from San Francisco, and less dramatically from Oakland neighborhoods, winked into view. We were quite exuberant that night, both youth and adults, but it was the teens who really charged up the energy there at the top of Oakland. I was bringing them up to see if they liked the site for the performance. Their imaginations fired up; the camera was on them; they were making decisions alongside the adults, with production problems receding and possibilities emerging.

The roof was multi-planar rather than flat. With this seventh, uncovered rooftop floor, the building was taller than many, but not all, of those immediately surrounding it. Across the street the Federal Building towered higher, forming one of the interesting backdrops from a roof-level perspective. The highest plane on the roof with its spare steel girders overhead would be automatically lit as the sun went down, emulating an urban street. A four-foot concrete protective fence surrounded the perimeter, and elevator banks on two sides formed pedestrian access. At night the mostly empty garage was typical, its darkened and cavernous concrete spaces mute testimony to the scarcity of night activity downtown during that time.

I liked the space and hoped we could work it out with the city, which was using part of the space as temporary parking for their service vehicles, and could handle the insurance issues. Time was running out. Everyone concerned—the college, the city, the school district, and Bramalea—deliberated over the insurance issues, until finally the college, over the objections of the CFO, offered a liability rider. Car insurance, for body or interior damage, was another issue to be worked out.

In terms of the space, although layered and made up of four main quadrants, it was workable. It had a certain aesthetic appeal (if you were a connoisseur of parking lots, which I was becoming) and would be particularly magical at sunset and at night. The kids liked it. The production TEAM members liked it. The television crew strategized where they could house their switcher. Many of the staging issues could be answered here, and it was a central space for young performers coming from East, North, and West Oakland. Although we planned to provide transportation buses from school sites, it was central to subway and bus transportation, and there was plenty of parking for the 100 or more production crew and volunteers we anticipated and the (hopefully) large audience.

The site is critical to the aesthetic development of a public work; it carries new opportunities, interpretations, and keenly felt limitations. One important determiner of our ability to move forward was solved and the performance, after long planning, seemed a tangible reality. Another important marker that we were moving from planning to production was the establishment of a date. In large-scale and one-off public performances, many things remain fluid for unnervingly long periods. It is high-risk work, mostly because we were always working without adequate budget, could not hire highly trained production people, and there were many variables involved with doing something for the first time. Even something as simple as fixing a date was a moving target.

To pick an optimal date for the performance, we had to juggle competing events that might draw attention away from our event, opportunities to partner that could build momentum and meaning, the school schedule (after testing but before school was out), weather probabilities, and site requirements (we couldn't use a car lot when it was open for business). We had to continually revise the budget and make contingency scenarios for how much we thought would be coming in, and by when. In fact, we were fundraising up through the last week before the performance, and that week itself there was a tremendous flurry of activity from the donations team, which secured laminated youth leader badges, soda, and pizzas.

We had planned to do the project in the fall, but we feared we'd lose momentum and probably many of our youth planning team. Our original estimate of April, around Easter break, was wildly over-optimistic. We tried to find a window between student testing and the end of the school year, exploring a relationship with Festival of the Lake, an annual and popular multicultural celebration with food, arts, and music. If we joined their festivities and became an element of their program, what would be the potential benefit and what would be the downside? If we found a near-enough site, we could plan shuttle buses to get the audience from one site to another. In the end, a combination of factors and possible sites resulted in our selection of the Thursday evening after the Festival. It was to have extremely fortuitous consequences.

By this time we'd moved our planning to Bramalea's garage roof. The All-America City Award Jury Hearings were coming to town, and we planned our event to coincide with the national convening on June 9th. After a reception next door at Preservation Park, attendees from thirty cities, from Philadelphia to Fort Lauderdale would be encouraged to visit our production on the rooftop.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals followed my pattern with large-scale performances. We created tiers of responsibility and participation based on small team membership and communication. It is never possible to guarantee a rehearsal for all participants of such an event, and it is never even clear how many will show up during the final event. Therefore, contingency planning for more, or less, performers is always necessary. Rehearsals become a matter of instructing a critical mass of performers, trusting that the car leaders will inform the others and that enough people will understand the basic instructions to communicate to newcomers. We held a "dress rehearsal" a week before the event, on the rooftop, with borrowed cars from scores of staff members and volunteers. We passed out instructions:

As the leader of your car, you are responsible for knowing who is in your car and their phone numbers...and make sure to get [rehearsal] information back to your car members...with your car members, select three questions and one alternate from the list of questions provided; these are what you will talk about during the performance. On the evening of the performance you will receive small cards with individual questions on them, to use if necessary while in the cars. When cued by directors you can change to the next question. You will be signaled by director to turn on car lights at the end of the performance. Wait until they tell you to do this. You will be signaled by directors when to get out of your car at the end of the performance. Don't get out even if you see others

getting out... Thanks for participating, this event was planned by many people, adults and teens, in order to give you a voice in the media and to your community. We hope you have a good time. [Letter, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The day of the dress rehearsal was our first intense production experience, with staff parking cars, directing traffic, dealing with scores of students, handling the press, and rehearsing for all the aspects of a large production. Our core planning team was suddenly put into an environment where they did not have access to us, their artist mentors, and they found themselves expected to attend to being performers like all the other students. Immediately after the rehearsal, they called Jacoby and me and several of the stage people together on the rooftop with an urgent and reasoned demand: they wanted to be part of the production team, not simply part of the performance, and we'd left them behind in the flurry of intense stage production. We realized they were right, so we reconfigured their roles to have both a place of leadership in the cars, and then, toward the end of the piece, they would sit on top of the hoods of cars that lined the passage toward the exit, serving as ambassadors to challenge the audience about what they thought they'd seen and heard.

The rehearsals were layered and sequential, planned to accomplish many things in a synergistic way, giving all a sense of the scale of the upcoming event. Besides practicing for the performance, we allowed key press in to create anticipatory articles. The same day, the stage preparation was finalized. Michael Manwaring, the graphic designer and my faculty colleague, did pro bono design for the project, coming up with an incredibly imaginative and compelling poster and handbill designs. He designed the stage, suggesting we get traffic signs from California Transit Authority to place around the circumference of the walls overlooking the city and adorned the building with a large banner proclaiming "The Roof Is On Fire." We placed blinking emergency street construction signs and other referential materials throughout the garage. We dropped a large donated purple banner, designed by Michael, off the roof on the side of the building where the audience would enter, ride the elevator up to the fifth floor, and then walk through the parked car/sound installation as they continued up to the sixth floor and the roof.

We rehearsed our emergency medical plan with the Oakland Fire Department. Captain Parker brought up the idea of using the city's largest hook and ladder truck to open the show, and they became part of the first act, with sirens and ladder extending up six floors.

Then the unexpected happened. The day after our dress rehearsal, June 5, the Festival at the Lake was in full swing. There were so many cars it was hard to get near the always-popular

Lake Merritt, and the police had barricaded many streets to cut down on traffic and teenage cruising. I was too busy to go, but later that hot summer evening I switched on my television, flipping channels to find local news. Grainy black-and-white footage was playing on every station, repeated over and over. First there were teenagers in groups, skipping, almost running, sullenly down a street, somewhere near Lake Merritt. Suddenly, one young man turned to face a large plate glass window and in a single fluid move kicked the glass in. He and his friends continued moving down the street, not running but walking faster. Next was a clip of a group of policemen, jumping together onto someone, wrestling him to the ground as if in a football huddle. Nearby two female teens yelled in angry protest as another officer sprayed them in the face with an aerosol of mace, and they hostilely retreated. Over and over the clips were repeated, with worried newscasters proclaiming a riot had broken out in Oakland after the Festival.

We had invited the public barely two weeks earlier: “Oakland Teenagers say ‘Shut Up and Listen! A ‘Straight talk’ Performance features Hundreds of Teens Discussing Violence, Sex, Drugs, Family and Media’.” The headline promised aggressive and honest conversation, although we went on to say, “The view is beautiful from the roof, but the view inside each car, inside the hearts of Oakland youth, is more captivating. ... These conversations, although unscripted, are the product of months of research and soul searching by participating teenagers—and will be heartfelt, provocative, heated, and enlightening” [Press packet, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Indeed, our youth media team provocatively and with tongue-in-cheek played on the dramatic tension between the perception of middle class folks about youth they had little experience with and the perception of those who knew them well, including our audience members made up of parents, relatives, teachers, and neighbors. Sixteen-year-old Unique Holland, editor of the school newspaper at Oakland Technical High School, issued a public invitation in our press packet:

We're setting the roof on fire in downtown Oakland, and it'll take a great deal more than water to put it out. Firemen, teachers, police officers and any other authority figures you can think of, are all powerless to stop the surge of heat anticipated from the rupture of flames... Unfortunately for all you aspiring arsonists, I am not referring to an actual fire.... Picture this: an immense gathering of high school students on top of a building downtown, opening their minds and spilling out everything—to be caught by the wind and distributed to the busy city below.... Inside us all, especially those of us in the younger generation, there exists a fire. How big and how hot that fire gets, depends on how you fuel it, and more

importantly how much it is allowed to breathe.... With our help, the flames that blaze will be fanned across the city to light up the skies of Oakland. You really shouldn't miss it! [Press packet, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Now the public context surrounding our performance, already precarious based on prejudice against youth, had changed, igniting people's worst fears. What would it mean for our performance, four days away? In the early 90s the Oakland Chamber of Commerce considered that one of their biggest challenge was to convince businesses and citizens that downtown Oakland was a safe place to be, and they felt that youth presence contributed to the perception of crime in the city.

As we moved toward production time we held our breath, and the Bramalea security team was increasingly vigilant about our plans for safety. Bill Newman, the director of security in the malls and parking garages associated with Bramalea, insisted on running the security show via walkie-talkies, with his security guards and a combination of our volunteers and conflict resolution people. In order to make sure Newman didn't close down the performance or overreact to a minor incident, I made sure he was standing right next to me as I directed the show.

Via our stage managers, Stephanie Johnson and Jacques Bronson, Bill could directly reach the volunteer doctor and ambulance team with paramedics. Each associate director had been briefed on emergency procedures, which differed slightly from normal medical and security procedures in that we didn't want to dramatically stop the show with emergency efforts, unless of course they were medically necessary. I'd spent days constructing a series of stage and performance flow-charts and procedures, accounting for every eventuality I could dredge up from my history of large-scale public events, although this one was overshadowed by the particular fear that people had of teenagers and their potential for violence. We knew there would be lots of behind-the-scenes forays any time a young person walked by on the street, as security tried to figure out if they were our stray performers, audience members, innocent bystanders, or potential criminals.

From the security plan instructions I'd drafted for Newman, "We do not anticipate any problems with the teens who will be performers ... it will be more important to monitor those who enter as audience. If our teenagers have a problem with audience members, security will be asked to handle it as discretely as possible. A security member trained in recognizing drug/alcohol use should be near the front door on Martin Luther King Way." Ironic as it was, the security team was geared to respond to youth as potential criminals and leading up to the

production I think they imagined, at the very least, bottles being heaved off the top of the roof onto the streets below, if not youth themselves. The mixed-generation planning team, of course, anticipated more problems from the audience than from youth, knowing the intensity of people's feelings about and fear of young people. We were surprised by what happened when the young people starting talking.

Performing Themselves

You are supposed to leave the performance confused, knowing that your reality is not reality. Your reality is a clothing or blanket that you put around yourself to keep you warm, to keep your mind in a certain set. But once you take blanket off, that cold air hits you and that cold air is their reality. You have to be willing to first take off that blanket to understand. If you don't take off that blanket you're going to continue to live in your own reality—which is not reality! You live in a fantasy life if you think everything is perfect, fine, dandy—"I don't have to worry that anyone might shoot me. I don't have to worry about drugs." Well, I'm sorry—you do. [Leuckessia Spencer Hirsh, Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

We held our breath: although as a professional I knew, of course, we should have a rain plan, but with the carelessness of native Californians, used to little rain after May, we didn't have much of one. We could always move down a floor, but the experience would have been much different inside. Outside, as performance time approached, it was warm but not unbearably hot. At 6:45 the directing team made our way to the directors' booth to meet up with Bill Newman, and our stage team (Jacques Bronson, Eric Tam, and Stephanie Johnson) began to direct the student groups to their cars, four groups at a time. The roof had been divided into four quadrants, formed by the driveway entrance from the sixth floor and the driveway egress from the seventh back down through each level to the street, with one directing team in each, responsible for monitoring conversations in 25 or so cars and keeping the audience from interfering with the youth conversations. These directors regularly reported to me on the status of conversations and audience responses. The timing was critical; the doors would open at 7:30, and we didn't want students to get too bored waiting, or not to be ready in time.

At 7:20 there was a last-minute walkie-talkie check-in for all people operating on our radio communication channels. The directors, who were calling the show, could in this way quickly communicate with the four associate directors, each in their different quadrant. Each associate director had three to four assistants, mostly teachers, who roamed from car to car, checking up on the students in case they needed anything or the audience was getting aggressive. The

assistants then reported back to the associate directors, who would let me and Bill Newman know if there were any problems. Jacoby, with her team of documenters and press, was also connected to the directing line, because we were doing a live performance, a media event, and a television documentary, all at the same time. Coordination was critical.

Downstairs on the fourth floor, Stephanie Johnson and Jacques Bronson, Eric Tam and Chris Johnson played tag team with the youth: making sure the buses made it to school pick-up sites and that the food was ready to go, checking the students in, and dividing them into car groups. The core youth leaders devised ice-breakers to keep students entertained while everyone arrived, and they caucused for last-minute planning of their special role with the exiting audience. Some youth were trained in public relations and media strategy by Annice Jacoby and would be talking to the media. Periodic updates on numbers of students and needed cars came our way up on the seventh floor. We planned which groups would go in which cars, some of which had been designated as media cars, ones that would receive the most targeted attention by KRON. Jacoby had her press table ready and was multitasking with Chris Johnson and his team of eight photographers, Craig Franklin and his five video cameras, Michael Jackson and his team of high school video documenters, and the media relations volunteer team who would shepherd press around as needed.

Gail Smithwalter, who was in charge of the stage, communicated on her channel with the stage team on the ground and other behind-the-scenes personnel, from car handlers to volunteers, from the setup of the bands to making sure the food was cleaned up in the staging area. The three of us—Smithwalter, Newman, and I were able to verbally communicate in the directors' booth, where we were raised above the space in the elevator shaft, able to see the entire scenario because we'd removed the glass protecting the machinery in the room, and while unfortunately visible, nevertheless fairly unobtrusive to the audience and youth below. At the check-in, the sound installation was turned on, we were alerted to the audience arriving and lining up outside, the volunteers were in their place, the directors and their students were ready, with last-minute bathroom trips facilitated and completed, the ushers and elevator script readers were ready.

The evening was perfect, the end of our hottest day to date that summer. Shortly before a fiery sunset, the audience lined up outside the seven-story post-modern parking structure. On cue, at 7:15 the fire truck arrived, to the delight of the audience, and—competing with the banner—the huge hook-and-ladder truck raised its ladder slowly, dramatically toward the rooftop.

We opened the doors to approximately 1,000 Bay Area residents, news media, and people attending the All American Cities conference. Audience poured into the elevator, and through

the glass window passengers could see the city street receding. On the sixth floor the elevator stopped, admitting entrance to flashing car lights, blinking street barricades, and a cacophony of teenage voices and sound emanating from parked cars.

[The cars] strategically parked ... [became] twentieth-century lighthouses beckoning and guiding viewer-participants to the primary site of the public ritual space above. As you walked into the cave-like, covered structure past the empty cars your attention was ... focused by Southen and McBain's original sound environment ... a compelling blend of teenage voices speaking out on issues of identity and local rap rhythms. This sound component ... provided an effective moment of passage to the uncovered top floor ... where the pageant-like event itself was commencing. [Connor 1995]

The crowd, as with Oakland residents, was markedly diverse as people walked from the last covered garage level to the open air of the rooftop: children, teens, parents, teachers, artists, curious residents, and politicians wandered freely across the expanse. Racial diversity, typical of Oakland, was everywhere evident, in and out of the cars, but the audience more white than black, and the students more black than white. Everywhere there were parked cars with windows down, small pickup trucks with teens in back, vans with side doors open, and, for the very fortunate, convertibles with their tops down. The youthful performers had become particular about their cars, complaining after rehearsal that they were in “dirty” cars that had been used, but tonight Oakland merchants and rental agencies had supplied us with clean, late-model cars and there was a lot of competition among the planning group for the first selection.

The top of the roof was littered with cars, new, shiny, spots of color arranged helter-skelter with enough room around each for an audience of 10–20 people. Within the hour-plus time of the performance the roof went from full light to twilight and, finally, to dark. As one witness described it:

The clean lines of the newly constructed urban parking structure dramatically contrasted the natural beauty of the growing twilight. From a privileged prospect at the top you could see the recognizable skyline of San Francisco in the distance. At closer range, the setting sun democratically softened both the new and decrepit buildings of the inner city of Oakland. One hundred brand new automobiles, juxtaposed in interesting configurations on the topmost level of the parking garage formed the stage set. [Connor 1995: 34]

Not clear about their role in the beginning, the over 1,000-strong audience soon became comfortable with their freedom. They completed their own narrative by walking from car to car,

stopping when arrested by a conversation, distracted when someone they knew passed by. It was a social event, with people meeting and talking and then returning back to the intensity of the discussions going on in each car. The honesty of the young people “performing themselves” was poignant, fascinating, and compelling. After the first excitement of the audience entering and settling into a comfortable pace for themselves and the young people getting absorbed by their conversations and overcoming any stage fright, a calm descended on the rooftop, generated by empathy and a deeply focused listening. There were 100 cars, and thus at any given time 100 conversations were taking place:

Male: *My father wants me to continue to study. He wants me to have all the things he couldn't have. But what good does it do to have all these opportunities? Many times we don't communicate—my parents and I. Many times I come home from school and they don't ask me how it went or how it's going.*

Female: *Nothing we do makes people see us better. Sometimes I get depressed. I get angry. Sometimes I just laugh at all the things they come up with. Maybe they're ignorant because they've never been an immigrant. The day they are in that situation they will know how it feels to have a finger pointed at them as if they were a criminal.*

Male 1: *What is my mother going to teach me about being a man? All she knows is what the man she [married] did. So, basically, the best thing is going to be another man, and who better the other man to be than my father. But yet, I try to go to that man and where is he? He's nowhere to be found.*

Male 2: *My father, the only thing I know about him is when I was two years old, how he sat in that kitchen. I know how his beard felt against my face. I sat back—I've cried about this, man.*

Female 1: *For me, being biracial—being considered black by some people and white by some people—I don't think that is a bad thing. I take that as a powerful thing. I'm proud. Why should I make people—if they don't see it as something good, why can't I see it as something good? Yeah, I'm black. I'm in America. I'm a black American. That's good.*

Female 2: *You will be accepted more than me. My skin's a little darker, my lips are a little fuller, my mouth's a little bigger—you will be accepted more than me. But you're still going to be looked at as a black face to them.*

Male 1: *Society messes you up, and the only way you can get back on society is by going home and retaliating on your own children, on your own wife. No one gives you an*

opportunity to get a job, no one gives you an opportunity to do anything. You know how you are going to react, you get frustrated.

Male 2: *You can't blame everything on the ghetto. It's like blaming everything on a certain race because they did something to you. That's not right. I got myself into this predicament and I have to get myself out. There's always going to be people holding you down. For every man trying to help you there's always going to be two men trying to pull you down.*

Male 1: *A boy cannot come at a girl like that because they're going to think you are gay or they're going to think you are something else. They're going to think something is wrong with you.*

Female 1: *What other people say about you is their business. People will say what they want to say. You have to believe in yourself and in what you can do.*

Female 2: *It's just because it's, like, human nature. It's such a need. It's a want. When you know you are going to go away for a long time, it's human nature to think, "Am I going to get sex?"*

Male 2: *It happens so often because it's like we've got nothing to do. It's not like you can never not have sex. It's always you can.*

Male 1: *It's always available. Sex is like Cheerios!*

Female 1: *People are pressured into sex all the time by males, and they don't have the education to say no or to stand up on their own. In the public school system they're not getting any education, and they're not getting it from home, so why wouldn't they lay up in the bed with someone? They're pressured and they're not ready to have a baby. If they do have a baby, it's going to grow up and not be cared about by its mother.*

Male: *What about if their mother says, "No, you are not getting that abortion. You are going to have this baby."*

Female: *That goes back to what I was saying about people trying to make decisions for other people's bodies. I think that's disgusting. I think no one should make a decision about what you should do with your body.*

Male: *So, should kids be having sex? If kids shouldn't be raising kids, should kids be having sex at all?*

Female: *I don't think kids should be having sex, necessarily.*

Male: *Realistically?*

Female: *I don't think they should, realistically, but I don't think that's necessarily going to stop them. I also think that sex should be a part of education. I think whether or not*

you tell kids about sex they're going to be having it, and I think it's better for them to be educated about sex, and about all the birth controls, and about STDs, and about all the emotional things that go on with sex—then there's more chance that they won't be having it. [Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

“With cameras rolling and audience members roaming from car to car to listen, the production had the haunting familiarity of images on the evening news,” according to Jacoby’s description for the press (Press materials, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001). But this story was different, quickly picked up on by the many press cameras focused on the conversations. Youth were everywhere in earnest discussion, representing themselves. It was one week after the Festival of the Lake’s “riot” had made national news. Here we were again, national television again training its cameras on Oakland, but this time young people, 220 of them, were in control of the message.

A noticeable presence was composed of local news media. Alongside the documentary efforts of selected students from the art college and Fremont High, reporters from TV and radio news stations created a witty, visual, double entendre as they too began to photograph, film, and tape-record the teens as well as the student documenters. Other images that remain in memory and on film capture the complex effects that the revelations of the students—their truth-telling—had on observer-participants. We were asked not to orally intrude on the conversations in the cars, but I became acutely aware of the communicative potential of my facial expressions and gestures (and those of other audience members) as I made my way from car to car to “eavesdrop.” I was also reinforced in my belief that listening, in itself, is an art that must be acquired and developed. [Connor 1995: 35]

The staging for an event that appeared deceptively simple was complicated and took scores of volunteers, including associate directors working with the youth, emergency and security personnel, technicians for media including communications equipment, press management, ushers, stage support including getting the cars on and off the roof, documentarians, and transportation for the youth. Throughout the hour and a half, my role was to continually monitor the youth wellbeing via the associate directors and to make sure that all around the performance space it was safe (in terms of security for the youth), while Jacoby monitored media coverage.

At three times during the performance I reminded the associate directors to suggest youth could change topics in order to keep their conversation going. We had some audience members trying

to intervene in conversations with young people in the cars, as we suspected they would, but our many assistants on the stage set were quickly directed to quietly and politely stop it. As one non-intervening adult said to a reporter, “The ‘straight talk’ was both scary and enlightening.” She indicated that at one point she “wanted to jump into what she felt was a racist conversation.”

We did not want to break the carefully constructed but fragile theatrical fourth wall, an illusion not only necessary to the quality of the performance, but more important one that leveled the playing field for young people. It was more to our purpose to let them speak independent of our beliefs about how we thought they ought to be speaking. Of course we were concerned about providing a platform for some of their own prejudices, even as they were injured themselves by stereotyping. We wanted to give the youth some space, without adult interruption, no matter how difficult it was for the adults. In our experience, their essential humanity would come through, along with the inexperience and misinformation of youth. As Unique Holland said in an article on the project, “Air is essential to a fire’s existence; without it, the flames will be snuffed out. In our society, too many teenagers are being smothered by the media and other powerful resources armed with unjust stereotypes. *The Roof Is On Fire* is the students’ chance at a breath of fresh air” (Unpublished essay, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001). An *Oakland Tribune* reporter noted:

Some of the conversations were so real that those who stuck their heads through the car windows, straight into the psyche of urban teenagers, could easily have forgotten this was theater. Other youths reminded the audience—with their notes and occasional stiffness—that it was a staged event, albeit an unusual one.... They covered a huge range of topics: sexism; having a Chinese-American mayor; being called a whore, bitch or tramp; abortion; the Festival at the Lake melee; suicide; the guilt of leaving families behind when going to college; Richard Nixon and Watergate vs. Ronald Reagan and the Iran-Contra affair; friends who steal; teachers who babysit rather than teaching; newscasters; and respecting mothers. [Media report, Box 8, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

It was a stunning sunset. Across the roof the quiescence was palpable. Although I could not hear the conversations in the cars, my multiple ears on the ground relayed that associate directors and stage directors were amazed at the way in which the audience had settled in to listen. I could feel it from my director’s booth, 20 feet up in the elevator shaft, the tallest point on the building. With its frosted glass window removed, I could overlook the entire multi-layered roof and stay in eye contact, and walkie-talkie contact, with directors.

We were keeping close tabs on the youth; they had been talking for almost an hour and a half, “performing” their hearts out. One after another, all four associate directors reported in that they felt the majority of their youth groups were beginning to tire. It was time to end the performance. People could come, and leave, any time they wanted; their own movement with respect to the performance was an entirely self-scripted improvisation. Whenever they chose to leave, we had a final act surprise for them. The only exit available to the audience was down the sloping driveway on the opposite side from the one they entered.

Here, just before they descended into the covered garage, there were two rows of cars, grill side out, and on these hoods perched 20 of our youth leaders. Their role was to shift the audience experience from enforced voyeur to performer, and make that deeply evident by the gentle gauntlet of questions through which the audience passed. This, the role the youth leaders invented for themselves after their complaints of being left behind by the adults during the rehearsal a scant four days ago, was a deliberate transgression of the fourth wall. Whatever empathy, anger, sadness, or awe the audience experienced listening to all these young people, we provided them a chance to share it directly with other youth.

On the way out, students lined the hoods of parked cars to elicit verbal response from the audience. “How was that for you?” asks Miriam Grant, an Oakland Technical High School student who has been a project leader since its inception. The audience had a variety of responses, most often awe. “I’ve never heard such heartfelt discussions,” said one audience participant. “I feel like I’ve entered a whole new world.” [Litfin 1994: 8]

In an interview with KRON I’d said, before the show, “Everybody who comes is going to have to lean over and crane their necks to hear what is going on in the cars. In a way, the audience becomes as interesting as the performance. The audience will perform the act of listening and the teenagers will perform the act of self-revelation.” (Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001)

As the energy of the conversations died down, I cued the four associate directors that it was time to start the quiet, almost imperceptible beginning of the closing sequence. One at a time, from random and different quadrants across the expanse of the roof, headlights would come on, signaling the ushers to move the remaining audience out. (In one of many behind-the-scenes cues, associate directors had their assistants run to selected cars to deliver the keys that would allow the youth to turn on the lights.)

The audience, however, didn't seem to be moving too fast. Instead many remained transfixed, moving hopefully from one car to the next like shoppers reluctant to leave at closing time. Suddenly, unexpectedly to all, including me, one car, having received their keys, began to honk their horns exuberantly and flash their headlights. It was an uncontrollable fire that spread across the rooftop, sending the audience laughing and scurrying toward the exit to avoid the cacophony. It was such a natural and spontaneous show of enthusiasm, the exact opposite of our imagined quiet and dignified ending, and it was so much better.

Now it was time for the youth to reclaim the roof and celebrate the end of the project with a dance, refreshments, and live music our youth planning team had prepared. We signaled the band, setting up on the roof, to join in the finale—to let it rip. Stage crew hauled out the refreshments and the teens leapt from their cars. Cameras scurried to turn their attention to the audience for their last-minute take on the evening. As the *Oakland Tribune* reported:

The audience's conversations were just as compelling—if not quite as inflammatory, as the teen-age talk. Jesse Kupers, who graduated from Skyline High School last year, could be overheard saying it was “sad that this is the only way people will listen to young people. They'll leave here thinking they have come and heard what young people think and they won't ask the high school students on their block.” [Media reports, Box 8, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

For the entire performance Bill Newman was monitoring and taking charge of all security and emergency issues on his own dedicated channel, but he sat next to me so that I could communicate any concerns to my associate directors on the stage. For the aesthetic integrity of the piece, I had wanted to keep an eye on him, since he had been the most skeptical in anticipating youth misbehavior. As we watched the performance wrap up, everyone exhilarated, Newman got a call on his walkie-talkie. A young person was seen vandalizing a car on a nearby street. We held our breaths. A few hasty calls later and his security confirmed. He turned to me triumphantly and said I knew it, it wasn't one of our kids!

Next Steps

We were somewhat surprised by the amount of attention and positive comments we drew, and with this came ideas from many quarters about how we could do it again, in another venue or on another scale. TEAM had set in motion an unusual process, a combination of politics, organizing, and art that was marked by its visibility, its timeliness, and the scope of institutional cross-collaboration we'd created. The performance was broadcast in lengthy clips on three local

stations and nationally on CNN. (We showed these clips at the wrap party for our student planning team.) Teachers reported that their students were pleased with the experience, hoping to repeat it next year. Chris Johnson and I reported on the project at a meeting of the City Council's cultural committee, chaired by Councilwoman Sheila Jordan, and they wanted a follow-up project. We presented the project in several forms over the next year throughout the Bay Area, including a screening of *Roof* video documentation at La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley and the Richmond Center for the Arts.

Craig Franklin worked for several months crafting an award-winning documentary, and Annice Jacoby worked with him to provide our perspective. We wanted to give something back to the volunteers and youth who participated; a relationship had been created, in different degrees with different people. In December, the night before the one-hour documentary was aired on KRON, the NBC affiliate, we held a free premier screening at the Oakland Museum and invited students, politicians, teachers, and volunteers. A few days before that we pre-screened the video to our student leaders so they would not see it for the first time on the large screen in public. By this time we were in frequent contact with key youth from the project, considering plans for next events.

The screening at the museum auditorium was a public reunion and, according to our postcard, "starred Oakland High School students and T.E.A.M." Planning team youth narrated a program of slides, Weyland Southon's soundtrack was played, and KRON TV News Anchor Pam Moore introduced the documentary. Afterwards our youth team answered questions from the audience, which included Mayor Elihu Harris, Councilwoman Sheila Jordan, Rev. Warner Brown of Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Lorne Buchman, President of CCAC, Police Chief Joe Samuels, Dr. David Lawrence of Kaiser Permanente, Denise Saddler of the Oakland Unified School District, and Professor Troy Duster from our Media Literacy Workshop, who also asked questions.

Duster and I sat next to Chief Samuels and he introduced me. During the questions and answers that focused on the content of the film, and in particular the youth leaders who were featured in it, some of the issues came up that would shape our projects over the next several years. One loaded issue was the relationship between teenagers and police. I leaned over to the chief, a large, trim-haired and broad-shouldered, ebony-skinned and elegantly dressed man, and said, "You know I've always wanted to do a project with police officers," and he laughed and said, "Well, come on in and see me." I did, right after the Christmas break.

When the program aired, there was a tremendous response on the phone line established for the program. From their ratings KRON estimated that between 65,000 and 70,000 households were watching. The station received 140 calls, almost all positive. Franklin's labor of love was truly a fine piece of filmmaking, and the program was aired several times over the next year.

Even after the screening, which wrapped an important segment of the project, it seemed to us there needed to be a next step. We'd promoted our work as a change agent in the schools, and again the old conundrum came up: Were we an organization or an artwork, or something in between? Our subsequent planning took directions that seemed to go nowhere, although each in fact deepened our thinking. For example, we developed a partnership with KRON and together unsuccessfully sought funding for a conflict resolution/media literacy program in five regional communities, each one ending with a small scale "Roof" speak-out. What motivated our plan to take the project into a larger region—and many educators, from as far away as Alabama, were interested in the model—was the belief that in order to support sustained change we needed to embed the work in partner institutions.

While transforming youth lives, influencing adults' attitudes toward youth, and transforming institutions were important, for me there had to be an aesthetic challenge, and I'd been thinking about taking the lead from young people in a subsequent project. One morning a few weeks after *The Roof Is On Fire*, I took Hassain, one of our student leaders from *Roof* who had been articulate in Franklin's videotape, out to breakfast to thank him for all of his work on the project. On a Saturday morning we were waiting to order at a small café in the urban chic Rockridge area of College Avenue. Hassain was a soft-spoken, light skinned young man with blue-grey eyes and a swatch of locked hair hanging over his eyes. He was a powerful leader of his peers, charismatic, thoughtful, and very bright. But he was still a black teenager in a place that had few such customers. We were wondering why we weren't being waited on very quickly, chatting about school, and I'd just asked him what he thought we ought to do next after *The Roof Is On Fire*.

Suddenly a group of 10 or so large white men, police officers in navy blue short pants and t-shirts, the College Avenue bicycle cop squad, came into the café. They sat down a few tables away, and I had a perfect view to see how they all, individually, took note of Hassain, his back to them with his flamboyant dreadlocks. "You need to do a project about youth and police," he said with a wry smile, knowing they would be checking him out behind his back.

Beginning the Conversation: *Youth, Cops, and Videotape*

I've been shot at twice by juveniles, had my car run over by juveniles. Most who sell dope are juveniles, the kids who just got arrested for those robberies—two of them are juveniles, the others just turned 18. I mean, we can all go out and treat everyone with respect and kindness, and I tell you, they're going to look at us like we're fools, because they know the bad things that they are doing. [Youth, Cops, Videotape transcript, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The reason why people act out violence day-to-day in ghettos is because that's all they see—like when in Rome, do as the Romans do. For a personal example, at the age of 10, going to elementary school in Emeryville, we were throwing rocks. As a kid everybody throws rocks, everybody breaks a couple windows. We broke a window. They call and must have told them we had a gun, because the Emeryville police department drove up, four cars, everybody had a shotgun and they were telling us to get on the ground. Ten years old. Am I supposed to be traumatized or what? ...Our parents are like, "You have to get used to that stuff. That's going to happen every day." [Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

I don't know who you are. I mean, I grew up in Oakland, but I don't know you as a person. I don't know whether the next person I stop is going to try to kill me or if the next person I stop is going to give me a cookie. [Youth, Cops, Videotape transcript, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

A year after *The Roof Is On Fire*, in the spring of 1995, Oakland again began to prepare for the Festival of the Lake—this time with much trepidation and media commentary about how to avoid the problems of the 1994 Festival. Even before that Festival, residents near Lake Merritt, a manmade lake and popular walking destination near the center of the city, had complained increasingly about youth who had made it a meeting point and, for those who had cars, a cruising destination. Although generally a mellow scene at any hour of the day, with runners, walkers, dogs, children, and wild geese sharing the paths, for some reason during the summer of 1994, Sunday youth crowds were becoming increasingly rowdy. Public urination, loud music, and empty bottles annoyed and sometimes frightened people from Adam's Point, the community immediately adjacent to the lake. As neighbors called the police, police descended on the lake to make the cruisers go home. "It's on a Sunday-by-Sunday, case-by-case basis," said Ron Jones, one of the policemen who worked on the Oakland Projects in an interview with Dashka Slater (1994: 12). "If the residents call saying kids are urinating on their lawns or if we

observe them impeding traffic, then we go in.” For one or two weekends police tried to block all traffic along the streets surrounding the lake, but the community protested the inconvenience. So the combination of occasional police interventions based on neighbors’ phone calls and sporadic traffic barricades on particularly restive Sundays kept the simmering situation in check until the evening of June 5.

On that evening, at the end of the three-day annual Festival at the Lake, a series of small aggressions broke out: a fight between some young people at an adjacent gas station was broken up by two police officers with clubs. Bottles were thrown. A possible car backfiring prompted a rumor about a shooting. Someone said a policeman was down. More motorcycle officers arrived with riot gear and started forcing youth out of the area. A few youth started breaking store windows as police sprayed hand-held pepper spray. Rocks were thrown by young people; police wielded batons. It ended shortly, with 69 arrests and national news instant replays of an Oakland youth putting his foot through the same window, over and over.

Even within law enforcement there was a feeling that the police had overreacted. The event reverberated in the life of the city for months. The next day, national news broadcast the Oakland “riots,” one week before the city, the winner of an All American City Award, hosted the National Civic League and less than a week before *The Roof Is On Fire*. According to Slater, “In the media frenzy that followed, the teens were called ‘thugs’ and ‘troublemakers’ by neighbors, police, and politicians, and footage of kids kicking in windows and running from baton-wielding police was shown nearly every night for at least a week.”

In plain black and white this appears to be a story about youth misbehavior and/or police brutality, but the backdrop was an ongoing history of conflict between youth in the flatlands and Oakland police, sometimes ending in violence (mostly for the young people) and definitely impacting the incarceration rate of Oakland teens. The subtext to this us-them commentary on public space was its relationship to ethnicity and race. “Most of the young people I spoke to about last Sunday’s conflict seem to feel that what started as a minor incident involving a few bad actors was escalated by the police reaction into something that left everyone feeling angry and confused,” Slater wrote in her investigation (1994: 17). But reading Slater’s quotes by Adams Point neighbors and youth interviewed, it is clear that the Festival of the Lake event was perceived by these actors as racialized territorialism, with class and generational conflicts at their core. Sixteen-year-old Tayari Jones saw it as the same kind of police imposition people of color experienced every day in their own neighborhoods. “It’s not just Festival at the Lake, it’s every weekend, wherever you go, wherever you are. You feel like you’re isolated; you’re an alien.” “Lake Merritt wasn’t made for the people of Lake Shore [another nearby neighborhood],

it's for everybody," said Virgil Waldon. "It comes down to this: because we don't live around there, we can't be there" (Slater 1994: 12).

Our 1994 performance *The Roof Is On Fire*, with its dramatic proximity to the so-called "riots" at Festival of the Lake, had served as a counter to that event. As the next Festival date approached, the Oakland Police Department was receptive to our suggestion that we introduce a small experimental training project for a cohort of ten officers and about twenty youth. We were invited by Chief Samuels of the OPD to plan a pilot series of conversations between youth and officers as one of the city's several attempts to reduce tension in the weeks leading up to and during the Festival. The chief wanted these conversations filmed, and we received a small grant to support videotaping a series of workshops, and stipends for the youth to participate. The chief introduced me to Captain Sharon Jones, the highest-ranking female officer in the department, and assigned her to the project. She and I worked together to get the workshops approved through the police bureaucracy and to enlist officers to participate.

For me the workshops became part of our research, a logical step along the way to what would eventually become the large-scale performance *Code 33: Emergency Clear the Air*, titled after the police code for clearing the air waves. As much as each project grew from the last, it did not grow through a strictly democratic group decision, but was arrived at by consensus among a few trusted colleagues like Johnson and Jacoby, and Unique Holland, a high school student who continued to work on the projects over ten years. Tucked away throughout several years of work with OPD was the image of a final rooftop confrontation, an honest conversation, where the breakfast tables that morning at the café in Rockridge were joined, and Hassain could talk honestly to those officers. (By the time we did the project Hassain was out of the region in college.) Before we could amass resources and support to do this performance, we started out with a series of conversations.

Youth, Cops, and Videotape, named after the then-current popular film *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, was the title of our workshop series. We began with an intention to address the types of class, race, and generational conflicts played out daily on Oakland streets. Through this project we began to understand more clearly how police as mediators represented the ultimate in malignant authority, in a world of bewildering authorities, to the growing youth culture. The conflict between youth and police is deep, embedded in the image systems of both youth and adult cultures. Youth have "gangsta" rap, and children play with handmade dolls that represent "bad" cops. The police have their television reality programs where cameramen go along with patrol cars during arrests. The community's response to their need for police protection, their dismay at what they considered prejudicial responses by police, and their downright rage over perceived

police harassment creates a chronically conflicted landscape in Oakland and throughout the U.S. During our work with them, youth had consistently identified key issues with adult authority, and now we proposed to explore not just the world of youth as they represented it, but to support them in finding a voice in the institutional worlds that shaped their lives.

Our plan was to stage eight workshops or small group forums, as we called them—in “neutral territory,” in a series of sites around Oakland, including outdoors next to Lake Merritt. They were framed artistically as mini-performances, or sketches, with the drama carried by the improvised (spontaneous) conversations. To address the power differential, we always had more youth than officers, about two to one, and the workshops were led by Booker Neal, a mediator from the Department of Justice, selected as someone who might be able to mediate between the two conflicting cultures, respected by police but sympathetic to youth. Jacques Bronson, a member of our artist team who worked with us over a variety of years, videotaped the sessions.

Working with teachers from the earlier projects, we selected the student participants, some from the *Roof* project and others recommended by various youth organizations, and designed a series of workshops that took media literacy strategies—in particular, the coverage of Festival of the Lake riots—as a starting point. How, for example, was the division between youth and police represented in local newspapers and on television programs? What images of each group were projected, and what values were represented? The movement from place to place, each site accommodating this strange conversation taking place in a circle of folding chairs, was meant to emphasize the fundamental territorial aspects of the prior year’s “riots,” where police felt bound to respond to resident complaints of youth unruly behavior, protecting their “property,” and young people felt that they had no right to enjoy this public space and, in fact, no place to “be” in the city. Young people consistently requested youth clubs and centers in surveys; their presence on the streets and in parks was frequently questioned by the adult world, from their presence on street corners waiting between buses to the eventual criminalization of “gangs” of three or more youth in public spaces by Proposition 21 (approved by California voters in 2000).

Most of the police officers in the project did not volunteer; they were assigned to it by Captain Jones. They were clearly resistant and defensive, not just toward the youth but toward what they took as a challenge to how they did things. Community policing, part of a national agenda to improve policing, was not always popular among patrol officers, who felt their job was to protect, not to mediate. Youth-friendly officers, like Officer Terrance Jones, who was in charge of the Police Activities League, were less defensive but found themselves having to adopt the role of “teacher” in conversations that placed them between cultures. Accepting an officer as

mentor in one-to-one situations was not infrequent among Oakland's fatherless youth, but the general youth culture of the city resisted police, and many other forms of adult authority.

Having artists in the mix was offensive to many of the police officers. In an early meeting around a large wooden table in the chief's conference room on the top floor of OPD, several "recruited" officers arrived late, settling with squeaks of leather gun holsters and belts into chairs on one side of the room. On the opposite, the youth lined up, the young men slumping deep into their hoodies. A bombshell was dropped when Miriam, one of our student leaders from our planning group piped up, "Is this going to be another performance Miss Lacy?" It was a word I was studiously avoiding, and I rushed to reassure the officers who expressed vigorously that they weren't going to be part of a performance artwork.

Jeff Israel, an Oakland cop since 1990, was one of those most resistant to participating. He showed up at the meeting with his sunglasses on, which he kept on throughout the first meeting. Articulate, educated, aggressive, and not at all interested in the proposed workshops, Jeff had grown up a white kid in Oakland public schools. He didn't pull punches during the workshops. "Kids I come into contact with are breaking the law," he said. "There's not much opportunity for me to meet good kids." He was skeptical of the video project at first. But eventually he admitted, "I began to see their side more, just getting to know them." Israel exuded a tough attitude. "I was very direct. I told them why I didn't like what they said. Maybe it was harder for them to hear this from a white officer than a black one" (Unpublished Interview, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001)

Our community activist connections were skeptical, believing that our proposed encounters would fail to facilitate youth-police relationships, and some feared that it might even harm participating youth by bringing them onto the police radar. We invited representatives to participate as observers to each meeting to ensure a safe and productive environment for the young people and to voice any concerns with the process. Designated observers from Oakland youth advocates, in particular conflict resolution professionals from the West Oakland Mental Health Clinic like Millie Cleveland, took notes, which we reviewed between sessions.

One thing became clear immediately: both youth and officers were quite sensitive to the stereotyping they were subjected to on a daily basis. Interestingly, the media image of the police was as "loaded" with conflicting significance as that of youth. One of the significant motivations for community policing strategies had to do with increasing publicity around urban neighborhoods' alienation from police departments, an alienation that was threatening law enforcement effectiveness.

Male youth: *Down at the lake the other day, the police treated us like animals and that's how we reacted.*

Male cop: *We're also not paid to take bottles and rocks. We're paid to preserve the peace. If that means macing them, hitting them, whatever it means, that's what we're going to do.* [Youth, Cops, Videotape transcript, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

During our weekly sessions, which were spread over two months, a dramatic transformation in the attitudes of the participants took place. Perhaps more than anything else, the program operated as a safe space to explore attitudes. Inasmuch as this was our first experience bringing conflict directly into the realm of our inquiry, it was also the first time we observed the phenomenon of personal transformations provoked by repeated exposure of one group to the other. The changes in body language marked a transition from stereotypes to dimensional personalities—from the very first, uncomfortable meeting between the youth and police to plan the project, where uncomfortable silences were filled with the creaking of leather holsters, to the last meeting on a downtown rooftop where even the police, dressed in casual street clothes, discussed their own youthful indiscretions.

Whatever your position on youth/police relationships and obligations for citizen crime reporting, the point here is the complexity and danger of the worlds youth inhabit, a territory as different as another continent from the realities of Oakland adults. This project was not merely one in which youth related their experiences (as in *The Roof Is On Fire*), but rather where young people became politicized by representing their experience, counter, as it often was, to adult perception of them. The poignancy and tenacity with which youth represented themselves in the face of adult understanding were eye-opening and set the stage for a deeper consideration of how the “youth voice” might be able to operate politically, as an adjunct to protest strategies.

Student skills grew exponentially for those 15 to 18 students who completed the workshops. Teenagers debated with the verbally dominant officers and increased their communication skills, self-confidence, and ability to stand up to confrontation with adults. During a conversation on how residents in low-income communities of color refused to work with police, one articulate young woman battled with several officers at once:

Youth (referring to an officer in a crime that she had witnessed, along with other people in the neighborhood): *He [the officer] had the one who was shooting, but he let him go. I'm not telling.*

Officer: *What if that bullet would have hit someone down the block or hit a kid or something? What then?*

Youth: *The officers told him [the criminal] that he didn't fit the description of the person who was doing the shooting.*

Another officer: *The end result was that they let him go because they didn't have enough to arrest him—and you had that information that would have helped solve that whole problem.*

Youth: *But I'm not a snitch.*

A different officer: *We're like less than 200 people uniformed on the street. ...If you're not willing to do something about it, well, how the hell do you expect us to do something about it? What she did makes me sick—and we get it all the time, "Why aren't you police doing something?" We can't even get an eyewitness to talk to us.*

Youth: *Something could have been done to me from the inside to the out. It goes both ways. The fear comes from the lack of trust in the police officer telling on whoever snitched.*

Still another officer: *If you'd gone home and picked up the phone and said, "Hey, I was out at such-and-such. I don't want to give my name, but I was out there and the boy that they had was the guy that they were looking for." If you'd done that, you'd have given us a place to start. Otherwise we go into it blind. If no one says anything, all the bad actors, all the gangsters out there, they've got the stronghold. They've got you scared and they've got us blind, because we don't know who they are...* [Youth, Cops, Videotape transcript, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

To understand the full implications of this exchange, we have to go beyond the officers' frustrations about the young woman's withholding of information. We also have to see this incident through her eyes. What this young woman revealed, in her stubborn resistance, was the extent to which young people felt unprotected by the adult world. As the Urban Strategies Council study of 1996 (in process during this workshop) revealed, youth feared those paid to protect them even as much as they feared crime, in which they were often the victims.

The facts bore out their fears. In 1994, 50% of all youth deaths in Oakland were homicides, and 96% of these involved firearms. The young woman just quoted came from a particularly challenged neighborhood. But thanks to the efforts of youth advocates who sponsored her participation in the workshop, she was beginning to find her voice. Here, in this workshop, she courageously held her ground.

One of the young woman's most frustrated opponents in this exchange was Jeff Israel. Yet, for Israel, the project actually turned out better than he had expected. As Bill Wong of the *Oakland Tribune* reported, Israel said, "I thought it would be useless." But now "he looks at young people differently." Israel told Wong: "When I stop someone on suspicion of drug dealing, I think of the [video] group... I understand their fears a little more. I explain our procedures more now... I'm more aware of their feelings." Wong found other participants, both youth and police, who agreed:

Femi Osibin-Santana, a 16-year-old Oakland Technical High student, said he and a friend were questioned by a Berkeley cop outside a church. "At first I felt he was picking up on us because we are black, but he showed respect." Sitting through six sessions with police officers gave Femi a chance to "see what they go through.... It opened my eyes." [Wong 1995]

Several of the officers who participated in the project went on to work with us in repeated projects. Many were dedicated to youth development and often, as people of color themselves, understood the prejudices to which youth were subjected. They also understood the other side of the equation, the police culture with its complexities and distortions. The workshops convinced us that there was merit in creating arenas of conversation between youth and various adult authorities, not necessarily for immediate gain but for long-term change in the institutional and policy arena.

In Oakland more than a quarter of the total population was under 18, so targeting all the youth would have been too large a project. Instead, we meant to advocate for a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives by adult authorities in particular. The most we could do with youth was to offer authentic development experiences within each project, and to advocate for an understanding of the politics of youth culture among residents of the Bay Area, those whose fears were shaping policy through their votes.

Our project's conversations, which addressed a range of important community topics, were all videotaped. From this footage, Bronson put together a 15-minute videotape, which was then used to train officers and youth in the development of effective communications and positive relations between the two groups. The videotape highlighted key arguments between youth and police and how they came to a better understanding of each other through their verbal exchanges.

We were interested in directly influencing the culture of the local police department, whose experiences with youth and understanding of the cultural forces to which they were subjected, we hoped to change. That had a powerful yet limited constituency, as the number of officers on the street at the time was only around 250. The visibility of our work, produced under the auspices of the police hierarchy, positioned it within the police imaginary. Police training was one avenue for exposure of the notion that police and youth might be able to talk honestly to each other. Our video demonstrated no solutions, but a process of growing understanding where several issues were considered and all sides fairly represented.

Shortly after we finished filming *Youth, Cops, and Videotape*, one of the women officers from the group told me about an attempted shooting in East Oakland. Standing on the sidelines, a young woman hung back as police began their investigation. This young woman—the same one who had been quite vocal about refusing to give information to the police—watched the scene unfold. When the female officer pulled up in her police car, however, the two recognized each other immediately. The young woman ran to the car to tell someone she knew—a police officer—what she had seen.

No Blood/No Foul and the Oakland Youth Policy

By the mid-90s, formerly site-specific issues had merged into a national picture of discrimination against youth as a “class.” Progressives began to float ideas about civically ratified policies to operate on local levels to direct and coordinate resources for youth. This signaled a radical shift in notions of civic participation and rights for young people, ones that might need to be spelled out. In Seattle, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia, I’d seen documents that were adopted as “contracts” with youth, ones that recognized that social safeguards and civic protections were in order. Policies in these cities were initiated by youth development workers who were closely attuned not only to the needs of young people as adults saw them, but to the perspectives and interests of youth themselves.

While working on a youth project with teen girls in Vancouver in 1997, I was deeply influenced by their concurrent development of a youth policy directly confronting the notion of youth inclusion:

In order for youth to serve as a resource in and to the city, they must be involved, and to be involved, they must be heard ... and while it is “de rigueur” to include youth consultation on any project related to youth, there is no systematic venue through which the full diversity of Vancouver’s youth can be heard ... nor is there civic policy to assure long-term

commitment to inclusion of youth perspectives in decisions about the city. As such, the likelihood of systematic inclusion of “youth voices” in civic decision-making is by no means assured. [Unpublished Planning documents from City of Vancouver, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

These were exciting and radical ideas for the time. The Canadian report warned of dangers lurking within the salutary notion of youth inclusion, ones that were shared among youth development workers nationwide as they crafted best practices for working with young people. Most important was the notion of tokenism: civic movements such as this generally attracted those youth already in stable home and bound for colleges. How could a policy process be launched that would indeed go beyond a small group of token youth and address the needs of the whole?

Oakland was a city with a higher than average youth constituency. There were so many politicized youth-serving advocates and educators and vital non-profit organizations in the city that many people came simultaneously to see the value of enlisting a citywide conversation on youth well-being. In particular, The 1996 *Call to Action: An Oakland Blueprint for Youth Development* by the Urban Strategies Council was fundamental to providing concrete evidence of the need for such a policy.¹⁵ It framed issues confronting 10- to 24-year-old youth in their own words, describing the youth population in terms of physical safety, family stability, poverty, health and access to meaningful opportunity, and provided a list of indicators to measure the wellbeing of a city’s youth.

Overseeing youth and the circumstances of their lives was becoming a primary goal for a healthy city, one of the concepts in urban planning in vogue at the time. Indicators were crafted that would measure a city’s health, and youth became one of the categories that defined it. City administrators and planners were beginning to take the youth constituency into account in the redevelopment of the city, under the auspices of two mayors we worked with: first Elihu Harris and subsequently Jerry Brown. Actors from health care, criminal justice, schools, local governance—all representing different youth services in the city—had determined the need to work together more effectively.

In 1995–96 several adults and students from the Oakland Projects worked with Greg Hodge of Urban Strategies Council and Steve Costa of Oakland Sharing the Vision, under the leadership

¹⁵ The 80-page report concludes with a blueprint for infrastructure and policy changes citywide, and neighborhood-based strategies designed to promote the healthy development of Oakland youth. It is currently out of print.

of Councilwoman Sheila Jordan, to develop a civic youth policy for Oakland. Modeled after the Vancouver Civic Youth Strategy, this policy process supported an investigation of the opportunities and possibilities for youth roles in the broader public agenda, one developed in consultation with, at first, our student planning group members from *The Roof Is On Fire* and *Youth, Cops, and Videotape*, primarily Unique Holland and Danielle Herman. The purpose of this planning process was to recommend a policy statement that defined Oakland's position on a core of issues that directly affected the lives of Oakland youth, defined as people from infancy to 21 years but focusing particularly on teenagers. Our work with Oakland Sharing the Vision and our attempts to embed art practices into youth policy discussions put us into this conversation, and I took the role of drafting our first planning documents (November 28, 1995), which resulted from our earliest conversations:

A public policy on youth is a social contract between the city and its young people in recognition of their special needs and a commitment to support their growth, education, wellbeing, and leadership. It is a reminder to policy makers that this is a specific priority on the public agenda. If we do not attend to our youth and their preparation to assume full citizenship, there will be no city of the future...Oakland Sharing the Vision is working with the Mayor's Office, Councilmember Sheila Jordan, the City's Youth Commission and other key youth agencies to develop a City of Oakland Youth Policy...which represents a collectively derived official statement that the City will commit time, energy, and resources into [youth] education, growth and leadership ... and demonstrate a clear intention and commitment to make youth needs a priority on the public agenda. [Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Councilwoman Jordan put us on a fast track to work throughout a six-month period so that we would make the annual budgeting process. Throughout the spring of 1996, we met with several politicians, educators, community activists, and youth from Oakland to design a youth policy to bring before the City Council in June. Several people within the city governance had a vested interest and had expressed interest in such a proposal, including Parks and Recreation Director Clive William and City Manager Robert Bobb. The planning process featured a review of all departments under city government, in particular those services, policies, and practices that touched on youth lives; a determination of public sector activities in the city that impacted the social and physical environment of youth; and a comprehensive series of consultations with representative youth, including open forums and youth gatherings, to include their input. Throughout the identification of issues and formulation of policies, we pledged to recognize and acknowledge the work already done by community organizations, the schools, and youth groups.

Jordan secured funding to hire a youth coordinator, who produced a series of forums that brought youth and adults together in a series of focus groups and other activities, developing the youth and community input that would ensure an authentic and well-informed policy. In particular, they engaged with the Mayor's Youth Council (formed by Mayor Harris as an advisory group that also received leadership training), empowering its role in policy oversight from a youth perspective. A fulsome youth voice was the direct product of these organizing efforts, led by Marcel Moran and Kaila Price, for the Oakland Youth Policy Initiative.

The initiative tackled the tough issue of the quality of life for the city's youth. Its aim was to provide for the needs of its young citizens, from birth to adulthood in an integrated, carefully defined way. It identified four key areas of youth concern and wellbeing—home, health and safety, education and employment, leadership and the arts.

The City Youth Policy will not address every need of Oakland's youth, nor will it list every action that could be taken to respond to all needs. It will however define the City's position with respect to youth development, protection, and oversight in a set of inclusive Policy goal statements. The Policy will also serve as a catalyst to examine the areas of each City department that interfaces with youth in order to make sure our young people are being effectively served. Once adopted by City Council the Policy will be implemented in partnership with other governmental entities and youth service providers. [Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The Oakland Youth Policy Initiative incorporated community feedback and a recommended yearlong implementation plan. The hope was to complete the document by the end of May for final review by the Youth Council, and then to present the approved document to the City Council for ratification. For me, the most exciting thing about this policy initiative was that it started, grew, and developed by listening to the thoughts and concerns of a wide and diverse group of youth.

From the start the goal was to include the integral participation of artists in all phases of planning. This was critical to organizing young people, and Price and Moran, working for the city, produced events infused with ritual, performance, and visual art. They were responsible primarily for engaging youth in the discussion. Our TEAM group participated in the overall effort in two areas: a public media campaign around the issues evoked through policy discussions and a performance component. Jacoby was contracted by the city to produce the

media campaign, working with one paid youth from *The Roof Is On Fire* planning team, and I managed the performance part, pro bono, with two other paid youth from our team.

Consistent with our interest in art and policy, artists and youth from our projects worked alongside non-profit advocates and city officials, placing ourselves within the political sphere as actors dedicated to analyzing and advocating for a pro-youth set of policy decisions and practices. We had been theorizing possible relationships between performance art, public relations, civic engagement, and political lobbying in ongoing conversations since 1991. Now our contribution would be to explore issues in a series of performative forums and engage citizens in the creation and ratification of the policy. One of the engagement mechanisms was a telephone hotline that collected comments. The other was a youth-led media campaign, drawing upon our earlier media partners, in which Jacoby mentored young people in public relations strategies.

Members of neighborhood focus groups convened by Oakland Sharing the Vision were invited to join artists in staging a series of four public performances that functioned as “hearings,” creative forums in which the community could discuss each area addressed by the draft policy. The hearings would be, in aesthetic terms, performance sketches; they would take place in various sites around the city and focus on youth/police relations, parenting and family problems, health care and medical emergencies, and education. We hoped to create a series of staged dialogues that offered, for a public audience, the opportunity to witness debates between teens and adult leaders. We imagined, for example, that high school students might carry on a discussion, framed as a performance event, with police officers, exploring the ways in which the criminal justice system might more effectively work with youth, one that might take place on a downtown roof near the Police Department headquarters. Teachers and students might talk from school desks brought onto the front yard of Oakland Tech. Doctors and nurses from Highland Hospital, with a renowned trauma center that treated most of the youth injured through gun violence in the city, might join youth in ambulances near the emergency entrance.

In the end, however, the short time frame and limited funding, led us to focus all our resources on a single performance that would publicly present and celebrate the completion of the policy before it went to the City Council on June 18. This performance would distribute the policy overview to the public through the playbill, invite community feedback through youth-produced on-the-spot video interviews with audience members, persuade politicians with a huge public show of support, and engage the citizens of Oakland through the event and its media coverage.

Hoops was the game of choice in Oakland, a symbol of the dominance of black culture popular among all classes. Midnight basketball, a program to keep sports facilities open as a form of youth entertainment, was supported by youth advocacy programs. There had even been some games between youth and police, and this was a metaphor familiar, and comfortable, for the two cultures we would bring together in the performance. Basketball would be the “court” on which the conflicts between youth and adult cultures would be enacted, revealed, and transformed.

I assembled an initial planning group of mostly men who played basketball at a high-end Oakland City Center sports club, Club One. I also invited Frank Williams, who had played semi-pro ball and was a sportscaster on local radio. We added youth and police officers, and together we constructed a performance fashioned as a basketball game with unusual rules. The setting would be Club One, with its large and airy central court, a favorite gathering site for politicians, firefighters, businesspeople, local basketball players, and others hoping to pick up a quick game of noontime basketball. For this widely covered event, young people played key backstage roles—as photographers, interviewers, and stage directors—as well as performing in front of the public, as athletes and as members of our media spokesperson crew. A lot was at stake:

In this game, the court symbolizes the street; the ball stands for all the issues youth and police carry around and bounce at each other rules and foul lines are the boundaries; and the hoop is the goal. The players—police and youth—will be aiming high for that hoop.... A policy is meaningless—just another piece of paper—unless the community gets interested, comes out and cheers. For youth. For the police. For us all. [Press materials, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

It has all the trappings of a big game and it is, because this match up between young people and police is about much more than basketball. It's about letting teenagers in Oakland know that the adults are listening. [ABC reporter Dan Ashley, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The Game Night

This is a special game, a game full of surprises and multimedia works by youth and adult artists. It's a real game—nobody knows the outcome. Nobody knows all the rules. It's a game that goes beyond a game, meant to tackle some of the serious issues that face our culture. What's at risk is the future of our youth, and we all have a stake in it. You'll be

asked to do your part as the evening progresses. [Andrew Salzman's script, play-by-play announcer, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

On the night of the performance, the music pulsed across the converted gym floor at Club One, as some 600 people crammed into the space for *No Blood/No Foul*, a title taken from street ball rules, referring to the rough-and-tumble game played informally over all Oakland neighborhoods. (In a game of street basketball, where there are no referees, if there's no blood in evidence on a player, the players will not count contact between players as a foul.) Club One's spectacular regulation basketball court, with its own electronic scoreboard, was surrounded on two levels by exercise bikes and a running track on the second level. On this night, as the large but orderly audience pushed into the gym, they saw a transformed court, surrounded on three sides by 180-foot-long graffiti murals. The scenes of Oakland streets by young painters revealed associations between cops and youth and phrases from the game, for example technical foul, out of bounds. The exercise bikes had been replaced with bleacher seating, and posters placed around the floor advertised statistics about youth and the criminal justice system.

Half of the audience traveled to the second-floor running track, where they could overlook the basketball court. Along the railing of the running track, 20 video monitors seemed to look down onto the court below. At the beginning of the game they were blank, but soon they would have a role in the performance. Behind the audience on this second floor, black asphalt paper provided a street-inspired wall, the length of the running track, on which the audience was invited to scrawl their own answers to the questions chalked on the paper—What are stereotypes of Oakland's youth? and Have you ever been jacked by police?

Youth were, of course, everywhere and served in all capacities during the evening. Youth ambassadors in *No Blood/No Foul* t-shirts greeted the audience, passed out programs, and directed everyone to a large statement about the proposed youth policy. They were in front of, as well as behind, the cameras. Interviewers wielding cameras and tape-recording equipment asked audience members about ideas for what the city could do to support its youth. Special guests from the youth council, who had been instrumental in reviewing and refining the youth policy, were seated near the police chief and high-ranking police and government officials in the bleachers. News reporters interviewed Oakland Projects youth trained as media specialists. Other teens took roles in staging the performance, documenting it with photography, or helping in the directing.

The mayor threw the first ceremonious shot from the free throw line; then one after another the City Council members joined the pre-game festivities. As Bill Wong reported: “It began with a warm-up shootout between Oakland Mayor Elihu Harris and Oakland City Council member Sheila Jordan. She outgunned the mayor, three baskets to one. And she did it in her dress and heels.” (Wong 1996) The thumping bass of the original soundtrack combined rap with smatterings of street ball talk with police sirens and voice interventions. The soundtrack was pumped through the cavernous gym by multiple speakers. At the side of the court, two commentators sat at a score table and got ready to “call the game.” Andrew Salzman, a professional play-by-play commentator, would offer background material on each play and instructions to the audience, who would become much more than spectators. He would introduce the game, announce timeouts, and interpret referee calls. The color commentator was Frank Williams, who would supply backgrounds on the players and metaphors relating the game of basketball to the streets and to conflicts between adults and youth.

The soundtrack faded. On the videos surrounding the court at the second level, a pre-game montage and 20- to 30-second promos—interviews with politicians and youth policy advocates—set the stage. From a video interview with Councilmember Sheila Jordan the audience heard, “We have to recognize this is the first generation of adults who are afraid of their children. We have to change that formula.” (Interview, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001)

The play-by-play commentator began:

We are here tonight to support the Oakland Youth Policy Initiative. ... Volunteers from many community organizations and city departments have worked tirelessly for the past several months to draft this initiative, which promises to create a substantial social contract that provides for the needs of Oakland youth in four major areas: strengthening family networks; education and employment; safe, healthy neighborhoods; and enhanced leadership roles for youth. [Andrew Salzman’s script, play-by-play announcer, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The color commentator then announced the players, providing biographical information on each player. Over the course of the game, this background material went from distanced (introducing people according to their positions, ages, etc.) to more intimate and revealing (family relationships, etc.). He also pointed out celebs and family members in the audience, and he occasionally made connections between the game rules and real life, saying, for example, “A

technical foul was called—that’s like when someone runs a stop sign.” His role was to add “color” to the game and its players and to remind us

Youth culture has guns and gansta rap. Police have their own culture, and it includes attitudes toward youth. But at the bottom of it all, youth and police are symbols of something gone wrong that we are all responsible for. This game is about more than youth and police. [Andrew Salzman’s script, play-by-play announcer, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Da Rebels (the youth in red suits with *No Blood/No Foul* emblazoned on their t-shirts) and Da Rollers (the officers in blue shorts and pants) ran one at a time to the center court to shake hands with a member of the opposing team, as the color commentator called out their names and neighborhoods. According to Bill Wong, “One team, wearing red was composed of sleek young men and women. The other side wore blue, but some showed considerable paunches and gimpy knees.” (Wong 1996) (It wasn’t true—the cops had been practicing.) Each pair was greeted by whoops and yells, led by Da Rowsers, cheerleaders to get the audience going, help with halftime entertainment, and add to the general chaos and comedy of the final half of the game.

The game began with a jump ball. The performance, with its live-action video, pre-recorded interviews of players, halftime entertainment dance that told a story, original soundtrack, and sports commentators, mixed up the rules of the game. Each quarter, players, commentators, and referees played their roles. In this performance, the audience also had a role: as witness, participant, and in the final quarter, a surprising new role.

The game lasted two hours, beginning with the pre-game warm-up and audience entry, and four quarters, 10 minutes each running time. We allowed approximately 12–15 minutes of timeout and quarter time breaks, and 10 minutes of halftime. Each coach had four regular timeouts per game, but the performance directors would randomly call “commercial timeouts” to allow us to run 30-second television interviews, called “commercials.” Free throws, fouls, and commercial timeouts continued throughout the game, alternating on the television monitors with actual live footage of the game.

We also had special rules for fouls: a total of five was necessary to foul out. After three fouls in the first or second quarter, a player was removed from the game for the duration of that quarter and placed in a penalty area with a sign overhead:

\$100,000 will build one youth detention cell or...

Send 1,000 youth to camp
Tutor 200 students for a year
Provide a safe evening's fun for 25,000 youth

The changed rules were dramatically illustrated as the first foul that was called by one of the two referees. As the player walked to the free throw line, the lights overhead dimmed and the player paused. Around the top of the court and courtside, television sets clicked on and someone—an officer or a youth—talked about the personal street-level fouls they'd experienced. It was sometimes difficult to tell an officer from a young person on the screens. Many of the African American male officers had had the same kinds of experiences as the youth—their complaints virtually similar. According to Pete Hodgdon reporting on the event, “There were harsher moments; the timeout TV interviews were often stark, ‘I take a lot of pride in my job,’ one officer said in an interview. ‘Here’s some poo-butt kid telling me, ‘You can’t do that to me.’” A kid shouldn’t be acting that way.” (Hodgdon 1996) The interviews were interspersed with statistics about youth and the criminal justice system.

One had to be alert, in the fast-paced game amid the distracting murals, music, photographers, videos, and crowds of acquaintances and friends, to spot a subtle change. Unbeknownst at first to the audience, referees were changed. In the first quarter there were two adult referees, and no one thought much about it, dressed officially as they were in regulation striped shirts. But in the second quarter the referees were teenagers, the change imperceptible until announced halfway through. Now youth were in charge of the show and calling the fouls.

At halftime Da Rowsers roused the crowd in cheering for teams and delivered the promised raffle draw. The price of each raffle ticket: add your name to a mailing list and volunteer to support a youth activity of your choice. The Jam Patrol, a dance group of five young men from local high schools—Chauncy Anderson, Clayton Bell, Adrian Johnson, Rocklin Thompson, Shou Lin Wright, outfitted by Oakland Gear—performed a spectacular and acrobatic step line. Marcel Moran and Kaila Price presented key aspects of the youth policy along with prizes, more music, and cheers for winning ticket holders.

As the buzzer sounded the third quarter, it was suddenly a very different game. Adult referees during the first quarter and youth referees during the second were not replaced. In the third quarter there were no referees, and a highly suspect honor system took its place. The clock continued to run throughout and players called their own fouls. Fouls weren’t marked with free throws but with possession of the ball, and fouls didn’t count toward the player total. No one sat in the penalty box. It was street ball rules—no blood, no foul—and the game became

progressively chaotic. In keeping with the symbolism of a situation that needed to create a new set of rules, the television monitors blinked on and off with disturbing statistics of ways in which youth were criminalized in the state.

When the fourth quarter began, the blues were way behind. This time the audience was the referee and the crowds roared. One youth and one adult referee called fouls, relayed to the play-by-play commentator, and he instructed the audience that each foul would be voted up, or down, by the audience's volume. Da Rowsers led the audience in cheering for each side on every foul, the numbers of which were increasing as the game became more and more heated. As before, fouls and free throws were punctuated by video interruptions for the commercial timeouts.

At the end of the game, with the youth far ahead, the final buzzer sounded and the scoreboard revealed the embarrassing loss: youth trumped police by 30 points in a no-contest game. But it wasn't over yet. As soon as the buzzer sounded, players rushed aggressively toward the center of the court. The overhead lights went out briefly, and when they came up the players were huddled together in small circles on chairs that had quickly appeared in the moments of darkness. The exiting audience listened to the conversations as players, exhausted and exhilarated from the game, began to talk to each other about their troubles on the streets.

They first talked about the game, then about their relationship to each other in real life. They were instructed not to talk to audience members until the reception that followed. The audience was invited to overhear this series of spontaneous discussions as they exited, and many lingered over these fascinating groups. This final role for the audience positioned them as witnesses to the potential of honest discussion between cops and youth—the first time we'd tried this in public.

Usually, in Oakland and other cities, it's cops vs. kids on the streets, in one another's faces, angry, taunting, tense and sometimes violent. This time, cops and kids were on stage together, playing a real game that was part of an innovative performance art piece. They did so ... to illustrate the possibility of antagonists finding less confrontational ways of dealing with one another. [Press materials, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

In the lobby as the audience walked past, 20 phones on tables invited audience response to questions determined by the youth policy advocates: "Talk back"—"Respond"—"How can we win this game?"—"What can you do?" The phones were directly connected to an answering machine that recorded audience messages, later transcribed and delivered to the city in support

of the youth policy. Outside an opulent dinner reception was prepared for the players, their families, and the production staff.

No Blood/No Foul's production integrated art into the policy-making process and provided an opportunity for the community to get involved. This was public art in support of public policy development. The performance received spectacular news coverage, from Bay TV, Channels 2, 4, 5, 7, the Sports Channel, and nationally from CNN news. *The Oakland Tribune*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Los Angeles Times* all carried articles and KQED, KPIX, and KCBS radio reported on the performance. Two weeks after the performance, the policy went before the City Council for a vote and was passed, allocating approximately \$170,000 to the implementation year.

If approved, city leaders say, the Oakland youth policy may provide the groundwork for a campaign to pass a city tax initiative for both children and seniors. One possibility is to guarantee funds for youth programs as San Francisco does. With the passage of Proposition J in 1991, San Francisco became the first city in the nation to pass a law dedicating a specific percentage of its property taxes—2.5 percent over 10 years—to children's services.... Unlike San Francisco, which passed the tax measure first and then developed its plan to spend the money, Oakland is developing its wish list before it considers a tax. [Olszewski 1996]

In the early spring of 1997, after the successful passage of the youth policy and the subsequent ballot initiative Kids First, we presented the *No Blood/No Foul* documentary by Michele Baughan at the Oakland Museum. The screening, free to the public, featured several youth and police as presenters, the film, and a staged Q and A session with participants sitting on a bleacher onstage and audience members from the full house of youth, families, and residents, asking them questions.

*We heard a lot about disrespect. Who disrespects who, and what is the result?
What are the dynamics of tension that occur in situations where police are called in?
What keeps young people in the neighborhood from wanting to become police officers?
In what ways are officers' roles in the community not clearly defined to the community?*
[Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The show was dedicated to one of the muralists we'd worked with in *No Blood/No Foul* who had died since the performance. Dream was a 26-year-old artist of Filipino heritage, whose work addressed social issues such as police brutality and the marketing of tobacco to young

people. Curated by Namane Mohlabane and paid for their work, Dream and a group of his colleagues had come together in private spaces to spray-paint these works of art, but because they were in fact true street artists they would not use their real names. We worked with Namane and the artists again, when *No Blood/No Foul* was presented as a video installation in 1996 at the international contemporary art exhibition “Atopic Site,” held at Tokyo Big Site. Unique Holland, Jacques Bronson, Mike Shaw, and I traveled there to install newly commissioned murals in a large basketball court surrounded by high chain-link fence, with multiple video monitors on the top of the fence displaying officers and youth discussing conflicts, translated into Japanese language.

Expectations: Girls and Graduation

Americans seem bent on making the lives of teenage parents and their children even harder than they already are. They are the people for whom the schools, the health care system, and the labor market have been painful and unrewarding places. Now, it seems, young parents are being assigned responsibility for society's failures... Never have [young women and their babies] needed help more, yet never have Americans been less willing to help and more willing to blame. [Luker 1997: 19]

Teenage Pregnancy in the News

It was summer in Oakland, 1997, and I was waiting in line at a secondhand clothing store on College Avenue, across from the café where Hassain and I had had breakfast with the bicycle policemen. I spoke to a woman waiting in line with me, a pretty African American woman, small, casually dressed, and much younger looking than her thirty years. She worked in community health care. I told her about *Expectations*, our youth project with pregnant and parenting teens. We moved through the line, engaged in our discussion of current statewide welfare reform debates centering, in the “white” imaginary, on the twin specters of blackness and youth. I mentioned how we encouraged the young women in our project to explore their bodies as political signifiers. Each one had a story about experiencing a public gaze, overt commentary, and occasionally even a stray hand or two that landed, meaningfully and with disapprobation, on their swollen bellies. She told me her own story: when she was a pregnant 28-year-old married professional, a white woman, mistaking her for an unmarried teen, approached her on a public street to extract an expression of remorse and shame. To her astonishment the woman said, “I don’t want to pay for your mistakes.” The assumption of careless promiscuity was racial profiling, female-style.

When I was a teenager in California's San Joaquin Valley (the Central Valley) in the 1960s, teenage pregnancy was higher, nationwide, than it was during the 1990s. Several of my best friends, all white, in the mixed-race and only public school in town, were pregnant as teenagers and bore their children. One was thirteen years old and scarcely past puberty. At that time the preferred method of dealing with teen pregnancies was forced marriage, although seldom did these youthful liaisons last. Kristen Luker points out in her 1997 book, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*, that birth rates for teenagers actually reached their apex between 1946 and 1964, peaking in 1957, and they had since declined, national media coverage to the contrary. In the early 70s the term "teenage pregnancy" was not in public use, but the number of published articles in the U.S. on the subject grew exponentially over the next twenty years. (At issue was the increase in pregnancies outside of marriage, influenced by a variety of social factors.) As we began the Oakland Projects, cover stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* were part of a barrage of over two hundred articles on the subject in a single year.

Coincidentally, books like Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* (1994) explored systemic disempowerment of girls. Much of this literature was critiqued as "effectively silenc[ing] and exclud[ing] the experiences of girls of color in general, and Black girls in particular" (Gonick 2006). According to Ruth Nicole Brown (2009), "little about that discourse addressed the material realities of Black girlhood," including foster care, poverty, health care access and incarceration rates. Immediate community attitudes to early child bearing, while perhaps most influenced by class, had different meanings among ethnic cultures, and urban youth subculture was developing its own unique positions on the subject.

It took those of us working on the Oakland Projects a little longer to untangle our positions on gender at the intersection of youth, race, and class narratives. Although young women were equal or dominant in project leadership roles, the gender gap in subject matter in our conversations was noticeable. It was not that males were more vocal on issues with the police and criminal justice system in our workshops and performances, but the political analysis of the criminal justice struggle—from street-level confrontations between youth and police, addressed by organizations such as CopWatch and Pueblo, to the rise in imprisonment, addressed by organizations like Critical Resistance—was more developed and visible. Females backed up the importance of this as they witnessed the harassment of their boyfriends and the incarceration of their fathers and they experienced increasing police harassment themselves.

During the years of the Oakland Projects I attended criminal justice presentations on both sides of the political spectrum: from Critical Resistance conferences to national police forums. Everyone was trying to understand the complex relationships between crime, poverty, race, and

age. Most young men had an experience of being jacked by the police, and these narratives fueled an analysis of the inequities of criminal justice that became the vocal front of the rising youth resistance movement. But where was the political analysis of the misuse of women's bodies and the limiting of options that could come with bearing children? How in the youth movement did young women's personal narratives of sex, parenting, and poverty get translated into actionable political analyses?

In an Oakland Police Department presentation, a consultant from Florida offered a perplexing observation: according to him, youth first appeared in the criminal justice system as child crime victims. Boys and girls were evident at this point in equal numbers. The second appearance was, statistically speaking, when middle teens appeared (most of them male) as perpetrators of minor crimes. After age 22, again it was young men who dominated, now with more serious crimes. The question was, he mused almost as an aside, what happened to the girls? They were early victims of crime in the same numbers as were the boys. His answer, a hunch rather than a confirmed fact, was that young women who were victims of crime as children became, as teenagers, users of the health care rather than the criminal justice system.

Teenage boys act out the heritage of poverty, racism, and family abuse and systemic oppression with criminal behavior that is costly and hard to ignore. For girls, the effects of damaging early experiences are found in future criminal behavior, to be sure: of those adult women who do end up incarcerated, an astounding number have experienced severe violence as children.¹⁶ But many experts suggest that childhood violence for girls is also hidden within a complex of medical problems, including depression and suicide, sexually transmitted disease, eating disorders, and pregnancy. Pregnancy is a particular challenge for teenagers, one linked statistically to a host of physical, personal, and social problems. The hidden incidence of depression among black women as a whole has been discussed in more recent literature since the late 90s, but at the time of the Oakland Projects it is safe to assume that depression was an undiagnosed reality in many of the young expectant girls and mothers with whom we worked.

On the other hand, the acceptance of mostly unplanned pregnancies can be an expression of agency on the part of young women, although they receive little in the way of civic support as young mothers. The issue of teen pregnancy did come up in *The Roof Is On Fire*, as a relational issue involving sexuality, commitment, and, to the extent an institutional failure was pointed to, it was education. As one young woman put it, "They don't have no education, they are not getting any education from school or families, why wouldn't they lay up in the bed with some

¹⁶ In Bedford Hills it was over 70%.

boy?” The young women we worked with talked openly about their positions, for or against early childbearing, and accepted sex and possible childbirth as norms of their lives. Brandy Thomas, a 16-year-old mother of startling maturity, was a key voice on the *Roof* project:

Was it my choice that I decided to have a baby? I decided to have sex and I ended up with the baby. Being a mom, a 16-year-old mom, and going to high school on a daily basis is one of the hardest things I have ever tried to do. I get up early in the morning to dress her and dress myself, and to get her to school and go to school. I get up about 5 in the morning and my day doesn't end until like 11 at night. Some of the stereotypes I hear often are like teen mothers are the worst people on earth, they're nasty and they're slutty and they'll never succeed. [Brandy Thomas, Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), age offers little protection from assault, as far too many young black girls inhabit hazardous environments as a result of the social, political, and economic location invoked by marginality. Mike Males (1996) insists that concerns with teen “promiscuity” would be better understood as adult “predation,” as pregnant teens report their initial experiences are most often with adult males (not necessarily the fathers of their children). According to Kristen Luker, on a national survey, “an astonishing 74 percent of all women who had had sex before the age of fourteen reported that they had had coerced sex” (1997: 145).

From years of organizing I knew that female-specific issues of sexual violation did not often surface in mixed-gender settings. Familial violence remains a private and personal affair. In classic community-organizing strategies, the community brings forward themes for action, and the neighbor who beats his wife will seldom be exposed in mixed groups. In the Oakland Projects, I assumed we were skating across these topics in the context of our more public focus on youth voice, media representation, criminal justice, and public policy.

After *The Roof Is On Fire*, we began to explore sexuality and violence with young women from our planning team. We were very careful, as there were few support systems for these young women around this issue. We supported their desire to discuss topics within their own peer group, some of them speaking only for a private audiotape diary. Our purpose in most projects was to understand personal experience in social contexts, and activism and art were the expressions of this understanding. Several young women became pen pals with a group of women in prison in New York who had participated for years in a family violence program. From these sessions the young women produced a series of traffic signs called *Signs of Violence* (1994), working with sculptor Gail Smithwaller, Annice Jacoby, and graphic artist Leslie

Becker. Guided by Becker, the young women used existing road signs and overlaid these with expositive cautions about family violence. A red stop sign replaced the word “stop” with the word “hurting.” A triangular yellow caution sign replaced the black outlines of falling rocks on a car, with a car careening out of control as the driver hit the female passenger. Ten of these signs were fabricated by our cosponsor, the California Transit Authority (we had worked with them to borrow signs for *Roof*) and publicly displayed in museums on both coasts.

We began to plan for our involvement with the Oakland Youth Policy Initiative and *No Blood/No Foul* with many of these same young women. Our earliest proposals were for performances—as hearings on health and family topics, inevitably raising gender issues. Although we did produce these events, the *Expectations* project in 1997 was a direct outgrowth of this planning. *Expectations* was a multi-part action: a summer school course, followed by an internship for young women to prepare an installation at Capp Street, which would include a symposium for youth and healthcare providers and policy makers, and, finally, a published broadsheet that would be distributed to legislators and educators throughout the state.

Summer School

Our 1997 summer school course started just as the state legislature was debating California’s response to welfare reform. It was a learning project for all involved, including the TEAM artists, who were turned into high school teachers. The complete project included scores of people: the main faculty team of eight, three to four guest presenters each week, daycare staff, and the 36 young pregnant and parenting students who signed up. Our learning proceeded apace with the project’s design and implementation from research (reading the literature on youth and pregnancy), from conversations with activist educators and health care providers, and, after the course began, from the students themselves. Our inquiries took us from schools to the media and later to the state legislature, learning how pregnant teens figured into national political themes.

Schools play a huge role in the success or failure of young people, and many pregnant teens drop out, having struggled with school even before becoming pregnant. One of the most significant indicators predicting early pregnancy was a young woman’s relationship to schooling: her success in middle and high school and her belief that she would go to college. All our Oakland Projects included both youth development activities and public art installations or performances. In *Expectations*, which looked at public school failures through the lens of gender politics, our youth development was a six-week curriculum delivered as a credited summer school intensive, followed by a paid internship for selected students.

We designed our six-week daily curriculum for a special population of students who were in, or had recently dropped out of, the Oakland Unified School District. Sheila Jordan, the city councilwoman with whom we worked closely on the Youth Policy Initiative was now at the Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE), where the Comprehensive Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Program (CTAPPP), offering a curriculum that included grade-level basics mixed with parenting skills, was part of her purview. CTAPPP classes were often held coincident with other classes in public high schools, a sort of “specialized academy,” and students could mix, as before, with the general high school population or stay within their own subculture. Oakland had one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the country at the time, with one out of seven babies born to teen moms, but enrollment in CTAPPP was so far down that the one of the major high schools in the area had shut the program down.

Working with ACOE was critical to our policy goals. However, as a matter of practicality, the association created many obstacles, the overcoming of which was laid out in a multiple-page contract with me listed as (unpaid) independent contractor. State daycare regulations, for example, meant dealing with general liability insurance, workman’s compensation, certification of daycare staff and facilities, and so on. County architectural consultants had to approve the YWCA for classroom usage, although it was used daily, approved by the city, in after-school activities. Building a curriculum that met state standards paled in comparison to addressing bureaucratic necessities like calculating average daily attendance records. While in themselves these negotiations were an expensive hassle, the result was that we were able to fulfill two goals: the establishment of our model curriculum for the CTAPPP program, and our ability to offer high school credit.

The county approved our arts-based curriculum, which would be taught as a college-level studio course, and assigned it ten credits. Through several meetings with an extensive group of community partners in health and education we refined the curriculum to ensure it addressed core concepts of self-esteem, expression, writing, reading, and art-making. The county required, and paid for, a teacher of record, and we hired Amana Harris, a former college student who had worked on *Roof*. Leuckessia Hirsh served as the teaching assistant, and artists came from Chicago and England to volunteer to work on the core teaching team with Harris, Unique Holland, and myself. The historic YWCA in downtown Oakland donated space for classes and daycare, and Sheila Jordan secured daily bus passes and lunches. In addition to these enticements to potential students, we offered a \$100 honorarium to those who successfully completed the course. These supports were necessary to engage the young women—many had already left school, and all were desperately vulnerable to dropping out of school. We asked our

community partners to nominate appropriate young women between the ages of 13 and 18. Harris did an amazing job of recruiting for potential students, and we selected the 36 students from their applications. From June 30 to August 8, 1997, each of 29 days began at 8:30 a.m. and ended for the girls at 1:00 p.m. when lunch was provided.

Throughout the six weeks of the *Expectations* course, the young women came, many of them quite faithfully, with their pregnant bellies extended in front of them, babies in strollers, or toddlers in tow. Their bodies were sites for growing social and political conflicts, as we matched their personal experiences with attitudes that were being expressed at that very moment in the state legislature.

Resistance was strong in many. It had to be, as they had chosen to bear children in a hostile public environment. In our classroom their signifying bodies became texts—along with their graphically described physical and psychological experiences, their distracted classroom demeanors, and their sly and overt defiances—for a different and more personal world. But this world was always and inevitably contextualized by the political cartography of the times.

Curriculum

When thinking about black female spectators, I remember being punished as a child for staring, for those hard intense direct looks children would give grown-ups, looks that were seen as confrontational, as gestures of resistance, challenges to authority.... The “gaze” has always been political in my life. [hooks 1992: 115]

In this curriculum, the students were the producers of the knowledge. We heard over and over again how neighbors and acquaintances, other young girls who were contemplating the timing for “their own babies,” and strangers on the bus felt permission to comment on their personal lives. Our exposure to their ironic gazes and consistent challenges in the classroom revealed a latent political awareness that started in their bodies, subjected as they were to contempt for their pregnancy that hurt, confused, and ultimately enraged them. Although they understood racism and intuited the relationship between their pregnancies and racism, they were not able to effectively analyze the political “meanings” in their condition. It was as bell hooks said, “While every black woman I talked to was aware of racism, that awareness did not automatically correspond with politicization, the development of an oppositional gaze.”

The classroom environment was chaotic, not unlike those in public schools—with over 30 students and the added distraction of 25 or so per day attending babies in the daycare center. At

times the students lost energy and were easily distracted. Other times they were irrepressible and high-spirited, often at “inappropriate” times for the “learning environment” of others or the comfort of we, their teachers. By the midpoint of the *Expectations* course we were all exhausted, the teachers and designers of the program as much as the young mothers with whom we worked. We encountered the overwhelming reality of working with youth—the demands of time and energy in the systems that perpetually fail young people. As we worked over the summer on *Expectations*, TEAM artists and teachers encountered the sheer effort to provide personal support and social services before education and making art become possible. Probably only Harris, who had substituted as a teacher in the local school district, was remotely prepared for the task.

They could be focused on what they were doing; or catty and excluding with the vigor of girl culture; or skeptical of authority and acceding to it stingily and for a variety of reasons only they knew. Cleo had a funny accent (she was an intern from England), and so they accepted her authority. Maxine was like their mothers, had an actress’ commanding presence, and didn’t take shit from anyone. Amana had one baby and another on the way, with the authority of childbearing in a woman who came from their neighborhoods. As one of the girls advised me, “If you walk in my shoes [have had a baby as a teenager], then I will listen to you.”

They could be worried and distracted for their children, doting and devoted, love-sick and single, looking for a job, good mothers and bad, fearful of potential violence from their partner, struggling to work out their relationships with the father’s of their babies, suffering from bladder infections and heart problems with no one to take them to the hospital, determined to finish school, and there only because they thought they had to be. In short, 36 teenaged pregnant and parenting individuals, many of whom had dropped or all-but-dropped out of school, were a handful of hormonal and behavioral issues waiting to be addressed.

They were also vibrant and engaging and fun to be with, as journalist Dashka Slater described in her first visit to a class:

It’s after lunch, on a hot, breezy Wednesday afternoon, and some twenty teenage girls are sitting in a circle in folding chairs, playing a game called Move Your Butt. When the person in the middle of the circle calls out an attribute, everyone who fits the description has to move their butt to another chair. There’s one less chair than there are people, so somebody is always left standing.

“Move your butt if you have a baby,” the girl in the middle says, and the girls all leap to their feet and push past each other looking for a chair.

“Move your butt if you breastfeed and your boobs sag,” the one left standing says, and about half the young women are on the move again.

“Move your butt if you have stretch marks on your bottom.”

“If you’ve got a baby boy.”

“If you’re under sixteen.”

The girls are wearing baggy jeans and tank tops, or long skirts and midriff-baring blouses, and they have colored clips in their hair and bright nail polish and jewelry. As they race for the empty seats, they are laughing and nudging each other and dancing in place until the room ripples with restless energy. Watching them, it’s hard to think of them as anything but teenagers, some brassy and inquisitive, some graceful and shy, all just on the threshold of discovering what kind of woman they might grow up to be. [Slater 1997]

Expectations was an identity project, where each student would explore a trajectory, from the personal to the political, the intimate to the social, and from the personal body to the legislative body. Personal problems were obscured by a two-fold assault, one from the media who treated them as stand-ins for a host of social problems, and the other from family and friends who focused only on the baby. Young women were confused by the attention they drew, in families and in the public eye, and the relative lack of support they received after the birth of their children.

When I was pregnant I felt pretty good because I thought that everybody liked me. They were really checking out the baby, I guess, but when you have a baby with you, you have attention. Everyone is looking at you, maybe feeling your body. I felt it was for me. Once I had the baby, all the attention was for him—it wasn’t for me anymore. [Interview, Box 7, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

We started with “Autobiography and the Self” as the theme for our first week, re-centering the conversation on them, not their children. Through a combination of art-making, writing, and consciousness raising we explored their lives, moving from the personal to the political but always mindful of building their self-esteem along with their critical thinking and media analysis skills, to better understand themselves and their worlds. Young women drew full body portraits with each other, related aspects of their lives through cartoon narratives, discussed how they felt when they discovered they were pregnant, and spoke weekly on each topic with Unique Holland, who aided the young women in constructing a video diary as their own personal and private document of the class.

As time went on, the focus of the class moved outward. The women looked at their family relationships, creating mobiles of their family tree, discussed issues like breast feeding, welfare reform, domestic violence, incest and rape, and began setting educational and employment goals for themselves. They wrote about what it was like to leave their babies in daycare for the first time, and why it was they loved their babies (“Because I went through a lot of pain for him,” wrote one). They sculpted works inside baby cribs that represented their own utopias, wrote reports on issues ranging from teen motherhood to female circumcision, and listened to Pete Wilson’s State of the State Address, in which he placed the blame for all of society’s ills squarely on the shoulders of teen mothers. [Slater 1997]

Weekly themes were progressively staged: from “Autobiography and the Self” in week 1 they moved to “Relationships and Family Support Systems” in week 2, where they assessed their current relationships and how to create sustaining support systems. In week 3 they talked about the impact of pregnancy on their health, experiences with the medical system, and goals for healthy lifestyles. “Goals for Education and Employment” was the midterm, where the focus was on what they wanted to do with their lives in addition to their motherhood responsibilities. Each student had an academic evaluation and counseling session by Sheila Jordan. In week 5 they looked at the media on teen pregnancy and policy debates on welfare.

A typical day would begin at 8:15 with breakfast snacks (they were not fond of the frequent donated bagels), music, and a flurry of activity around their children, with students running back and forth to the downstairs daycare center until we finally called a halt to it. At 8:30 we addressed class business, took roll, and then informally discussed the topic of the week, recording their questions so that we could be sure to address them throughout the week. Sometimes we did icebreakers or dance routines to give them exercise and help them focus. From 9–11:30 each day we provided drawing, installation/sculpture, and writing sessions that followed the theme of the week. We invited artists in theater, writing, and graphic design to work with the young women on specific projects, including their final exhibition. During breaks students could talk about these same issues in front of a private camera in Unique Holland’s video diary project.

Lunch was served for the students and their children. Every day at noon we connected students to a broad network of adults, role models, and options through presentations by activists, artists and youth-serving organizations. On one day, for instance, the newscaster Pam Moore, who had worked with us on *Roof*, came to talk to the young women about the news industry and was moved by their brash questions and the poignancy of their experiences. Another day they discussed sexuality with a social worker from the West Oakland Mental Health Center. They

listed to presentations on welfare reform, breast-feeding, employment options, Americore, and conflict resolution. After the daily presentations it was time to pack up, collect their bus passes, children, and travel gear before they set out for home.

In the final week, attention focused on preparing for a graduation ceremony and art exhibition at the end of the week. For the ceremony they divided tasks and created the invitations, selected a valedictorian to speak on their behalf, arranged a potluck, planned decorations, and worked with Holland to create a dance routine. They spent hours installing their art in a show in several sites of the building, as Dashka Slater returned to observe:

It's the day before graduation and the women have spread themselves around the YWCA building to hang six weeks' worth of artwork on the walls for their friends and family to see. There are drawings of dream houses with swimming pools and barbecues and as many bedrooms as you could want, and there are full-body portraits of the women themselves, their waists striped with stretch marks or curved with the baby inside. One woman drew her leaking breasts and crotch and commented on the paper's edge, "My baby is only 3 weeks old so I am still open and leaking. Happy cause I dropped my load but I still have one."

On the stairway is one teenager's image of her future labor, which she imagines will be "painful, wet, tiring, long lasting! Sweaty! Bloody! Sticky!" Another has drawing herself standing on the street with lines of pain circling her head, as the wail of a baby calls her from the edge of the page. "Please go back to sleep," the thought balloon reads.

Downstairs in the building's sunny atrium, the women have displayed the utopias they build inside baby cribs—and exuberant Jungle world, Galaxy World where men have been replaced by robots, and the tranquil Baby Heaven, where babies are suspended in cradles among the blue and white clouds. "Baby heaven is a place where there is no difference of race or color, it's a place for babies to relax and feel safe," a sign on the crib reads.

"There is not one evil person in baby heaven." [Slater 1997]

Public presentations were key to the Oakland Projects. They were the place where we solidified the youth place within the community, actors on their own behalf. They were important learning opportunities as well, where students learned to speak before adults and articulate their perspectives. The graduation ceremony featured Rishone's speech and Asha Zitani's letter to Governor Wilson. Schoolteacher and ball player Frank Williams (the color commentator for *No Blood/No Foul*) gave an inspirational commencement speech, as did Superintendent of Schools Carolyn Gettridge. A representative from Congresswoman Barbara Lee's office prepared and presented each girl with a special certificate of completion. It was the last day of the class, and

family and friends turned out to mark the graduation of 32 of the original 36 students—an astounding completion rate.

Installation at Capp Street Gallery

Their childhoods are not free from injustice and inequality, and, as they negotiate state structures and agencies that are often hostile to their wellbeing, Black girls experience politics at an early age. [Brown 2009: 3]

So why did teen pregnancy rise to an urgent national concern in the 1990s, embedded as it was within the rise of a scapegoating of youth? Oakland, with its high youth population and high incidence of teen pregnancy, took on a symbolic aura in statewide policy discussions.

Foundations poured money into public awareness campaigns, from the Wellness Foundation's inventive advertisements targeted to youth sex education, to the more ominous governor's "sex with a minor" campaign that threatened criminal action. Teen pregnancy appeared to be an out-of-control phenomenon that conveniently explained a host of social changes but divided, once again, the experienced reality of youth from that of adults. Seldom were young women's voices present in the discourse.

Teen pregnancy presented a compelling narrative that explained a 20-year series of social transformations in the American landscape. According to Luker (1997), "The teenage mother—in particular, the black teenage mother—came to personify the social, economic, and sexual trends that in one way or another affected almost everyone in America" (83). The two decades preceding the 90s saw a marked overall increase in poverty, and the nation's first recourse was to focus on welfare, seen as creating generational dependencies caused by teen parenting. "But this linkage depends on an assumption that reducing pregnancy among teenagers, specifically among unmarried teenagers, can reduce poverty," Luker points out (107). Welfare reform, ushered in by a Democratic administration under Bill Clinton in 1996, mandated a state response for localized reform.

As we worked together over the summer, the California State Legislature was discussing how to implement the federal law, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, with which Congress had created the most sweeping changes in welfare since the 1960s. As legislators discussed the shape of California's response, young women of color who were having babies out of wedlock became a prominent public symbol.

The public was wedded to the idea that early pregnancy leads to poverty, but Luker argues the opposite is true:

Taken together, more than 80 percent of teenage mothers were living in poverty or near-poverty long before they became pregnant. Teenage parents are not middle-class people who have become poor simply because they have had a baby; rather, they have become teenage parent because they were poor to begin with...poor kids, not rich ones, have babies as teenagers, and their poverty long predates their pregnancy. [Luker 1997: 10]

That summer, however, the California legislature reinforced this common sleight-of-hand manipulation of public opinion and ensured that the idea of poverty as a cause of early pregnancy—poor youth with less access and options to begin with remain poor after giving birth—was transformed into early pregnancy as a cause of poverty. CalWORKS, the California welfare reform plan, was signed into law by Governor Pete Wilson on August 11, 1997. Wilson contended:

The Welfare Reform law signed by President Clinton requires that 3/4 million people on welfare find work. If we fail to meet that requirement, the new law imposes substantial penalties upon us. But greater than any financial cost is the human cost of people who stay on welfare rather than work. The program conceived as relief for widows, abandoned women and children has become a major incentive for the skyrocketing increase of out of wedlock births. [Videotape of Wilson speech, Box 7, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Irrespective of the larger numbers of white teens on welfare, in California black teen mothers were the visible and public football in welfare reform. Less apparent was the role that this public censure played on the anti-immigration debate at the time, since the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the state was among the Central Valley's Latinas. Public policies are bred in social expectations and, once formed, become themselves the perpetrators of public attitude.

One of our young women students, Asha Zitani, had responded to Governor Pete Wilson's speech above with a letter, and she read it at the graduation ceremony. It formed a critical aspect in our design of an installation I was invited to do at Capp Street Gallery in San Francisco. Fifteen young women from the *Expectations* class enrolled in a three-week paid internship to work with professional artists, writers, and architects to create and install a project on education there. They worked each day with either Leslie Becker, Maxine Wyman, or Hirsh to draft and publish a broadsheet; with Jacoby to learn more about media and talk to Channel 4 television;

and with Lisa Findley, Harris, Holland, and me to produce the exhibition along with a symposium bringing together policy makers and youth around the issues of teen pregnancy.

The installation was held in cooperation with the Part A Architecture Space Gallery, which had a roll-up glass door entering into a garage-type space off of a well-frequented park in downtown San Francisco. At night, the glass door was closed, but the exhibition was still visible to the frequent restaurant diners in the area. Through the glass you could see the main image the youth, Findley, Holland, and I had come up with in our brainstorming sessions—a giant baby crib (designed by Findley), with a bright red ball alongside, as if left by a giant baby. On the windows were texts from the young women’s writings, and outside an audiotape played continuously, a loop of Governor Pete Wilson’s State of the State address droning on repetitiously:

Fifty years ago, the incidence of out of wedlock births in this nation was 1 in 25. Today it is 1 in 3. Of course, as out of wedlock births have increased, so has public spending—massively—for healthcare for the poor, for police protection, for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, for criminal courts, for prisons, probation, and parole supervision. Children born into fatherless homes are five times more likely to live in poverty. They are twice as likely to drop out of high school. Fatherless girls are three times more likely to end up as unwed teen mothers and fatherless boys are overwhelmingly more likely to end up behind bars. Welfare reform offers us the opportunity and the challenge to recast our very culture, to insist upon responsibility so that taxpayers no longer subsidize idleness or promiscuity and no longer suffer when illegitimacy attaches into social pathology. [Videotape of Wilson speech, Box 7, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Inside the gallery, open during daytime hours, the 12-foot-tall crib filled the space and the Pete Wilson narrative continued. Visitors had to squeeze into a tiny walk space on either side of the crib. On the adjacent walls were tiny comic strip drawings from former *Expectations* students. These drawings recounted individual experiences—from the students’ first meetings with the fathers of their babies, to becoming pregnant and dealing with social and familial attitudes, to giving birth, and finally to their hopes and dreams for the future—but taken together they formed a distressingly coherent narrative. As viewers squeezed around the crib space, they were forced into a close-up scrutiny of the tiny drawings.

At the back of the space a wall-sized green blackboard with a chalk rack was the background for particularly graphic experiences of giving birth—frank and surprisingly funny. There were stairs and a door that led the adventurous inside the crib. There, four feet off the floor on the bed

of the crib, a disordered and chaotic classroom was in full operation. Desks were piled on top of each other, facing the front of the classroom and a large television monitor with an absent but omnipresent teacher presiding over the chaos. It was Governor Pete Wilson delivering his address, out of synch with his voice, which was still distantly audible from outside the crib. His repeated fist jabbing was accompanied by disjointed and slow-motion applause from almost exclusively white men in the legislature.

Inside the crib, the sound belonged to young women who had participated in the project, including sixteen-year-old Zitani's letter, offered as a rebuttal on a small television set nested inside an open school desk. She chastised Wilson's punitive rhetoric.

Mr. Pete Wilson, I read your speech at the 1997 State of the State address. My name is Asha Zitani and I have a two-year-old son named David Alexander. I found your speech very disrespectful and ignorant when you implied that out-of-wedlock births are a cause of increased public spending for healthcare for the poor, police protection, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, criminal courts, prisons, probation, and parole supervision—this is absurd. Just because other families and I are not living with the luxuries of money, it does not mean that I am or will ever become a juvenile delinquent or use drugs and alcohol.... You say we must insist that individuals on welfare must meet the same standards of responsibility, accountability and decency—this is very offensive. Just because I or others are poor or on welfare doesn't mean that I don't have responsibilities or I am not decent. I work extremely hard.... Being a mother takes so much strength and energy. I am on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Being a teacher, a doctor, nurturer, provider, protector, cooker, cleaner—the list goes on and on.

I want to raise the point about you wanting taxpayers to no longer subsidize idleness or promiscuity. What does being on welfare have to do with idleness or promiscuity? There are some poor people on welfare who are very promiscuous and there are some rich politicians who are promiscuous also. I think you need to re-evaluate your double standard. You're complaining about public spending going to criminal courts, prisons, and police protection and blaming it all upon children in single parent, poor homes. How about instead of spending money on prisons, spend it on schools? Instead of spending money on police protection, spend it on teachers and mentors? Instead of spending money building new criminal courts, make a safe environment for children to go to after school. Fifteen years ago, the government was spending 12% of government money on schools and 5% on prisons. Now the statistics have shown that the percentages have made a complete switch.

I have spent much time researching your opinions. I ask that you reconsider your attitude and open your eyes. Just because our lifestyles are very different does not mean that you are better than me.... Poverty is not a sin. [Letter, Box 7, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

Expectations graduates were invited with their families and children to a special opening and a picnic in the park across from the gallery. They were interviewed by KRON television news. In September, we presented their broadsheet at the symposium that accompanied the exhibition. At this symposium young women dialogued with health care providers, educators, and policy makers.

Symposium and Broadsheet

Those black women whose identities were constructed in resistance, by practices that oppose the dominant order, were most inclined to develop an oppositional gaze.... The ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency. [hooks 1992: 116, 127]

I have to deal with people looking at me like I was crazy because I was too young to have a baby. Never, ever in my life can I recall people coming up to me and saying, "Brandy, what do you have to say on this topic?" [Brandy Thomas, Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The symposium was meant to introduce young women's voices into a very sophisticated Bay Area discourse, in a way that empowered them personally and politically. We researched the names of major figures in government, medicine, media, education, and youth advocacy who had written on the issue and who we thought should attend our symposium. Our intention was to bridge the gap between the experience of youth and the theories of politicians on what has been framed as one of the most urgent public issues in public life. This cross-disciplinary conversation involved media representation and consequent public perception; children and youth support systems including schooling, jobs, home environment, and health/sex education; and public policy and political decision-making.

Working with Capp Street, we invited a select group of professionals and identified our best youth speakers. The symposium, which featured a keynote address and two panel discussions, one following the other, was moderated by Dr. Arnold Perkins, the executive director of Alameda County Department of Health. He briskly set the stage for considering thorny subjects from interdisciplinary and intergenerational perspectives.

The keynote address (a short ten minutes in length as our intention was to engage both adults and youth) was presented by Maria Casey, executive director of the Urban Strategies Council. Under Casey's leadership the USC had just published its *Call to Action: Oakland Blueprint for Oakland Youth Development*, influential in the youth policy process. As she reflected:

When I was 13—I grew up in a poor community that was mostly African American, in Baltimore—most of the girls in my neighborhood became pregnant at a very early age. A lot happened right in my life ... but let me tell you about society at that time. When a young woman became pregnant in those days, she dropped out of school. If she was lucky she found a job at that point, sometimes they went back to school, if they were able to find someone to look after the baby, if they were able to hide the fact that they were pregnant or had had a child. For many of them it meant they were on the fastest road you can imagine to poverty, and their children were on that same road. I'm going to bring this story now to the year 1997 and I would like for you to think with me about what has changed for our young women, when they become pregnant and when they become parents. At least they can stay in school at this point, and we have a big responsibility, all of us, to get those who are not in school back in school and to keep those who are in school in school. That is our responsibility. We need to make sure that we are reaching out to you, figuring out what we have to do to support your life circumstances—childcare, counseling, and that we do those things for you. Every young person in this room is like every young woman I have met in my life. They need some basic things: they need love, they need supportive adults who will care about them, mentor them, go to bat for them, people who have high expectations for them—every young person needs that and needs to be supported by a strong community. We should all be in the business of building the types of communities that sustain their lives and growth. Our children need to be able to be children. Although you are teen parents, you need to be able to be children, to grow, and to develop to where you need to be. This is the task in front of us. [Audiotape, Box 7, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The young women were the first panel, and they discussed critical moments in their experiences of pregnancy: when and why I decided to leave school, for example, or when and why I decided to keep my baby. In the second panel, five professionals presented a 10-minute overview from their field, outlining the major issues as interpreted by their fields and proposed policy solutions. Speakers included the noted educator Herb Kohl, educator, the sociologist Jane Malden from the University of California, Berkeley, and Clair Brindis of the University of San Francisco, who was writing on policy and teen pregnancy.

Perkins led the group in a lively forum, recorded by KPFA radio, which included youth voices alongside those of the adults. The group discussed how girls' problems with school factor into the equation and what wasn't working for them in their school experience. They discussed the successes and failures of the *Expectations* class. With journalists in the room, they questioned the role of media in portraying youth and developing public opinion. With politicians the topics turned to welfare reform, how art could be part of the policy process, and they considered the state government's recent focus on male roles in teen pregnancy.

We distributed the broadsheet to conference attendees. It was a one-page printed piece that featured the writings and drawings of young women from the *Expectations* class. It was meant to personalize the experience of pregnancy and parenting for an audience of teachers, health care workers, policy makers, and girls themselves. It was a vehicle for self-expression set within a political context: to bring awareness to the complicated and intersecting issues of teen pregnancy and the stereotypes that directly influence these young women's lives.

One thousand copies of the broadsheet were also distributed to junior high and high school teachers in the Oakland Unified School District, to health care workers through the Alameda County Department of Public Health, and to statewide educators, healthcare providers, and, most importantly, state legislators. The poster was printed on velum, fragile and transparent, and the texts from the girls woven across the surface by Becker—the poetry, the promises, and the political manifestos—were as innocent and funny as the young women who wrote them.

*Oh toilet seat let me hold you
and turn inside out the rumble in my tummy
the food rising through my throat and into the toilet
for some reason everything
revolved around sandwiches with pickles.
I knew I was pregnant.*

*To all the people that supported me
like I.L.S.P,
my group home
m grandmother
my baby's father
my baby's godmother:*

I just want to thank all of them

*for being there
with me and the baby.
For them I can plan my future and complete it.*

*it's the 90s!!!
i know
when you
were young
most people
got married
before
they had kids.
i'm not saying
every one
should have kids
at an early age
or before
they are
married
but
it's a personal thing not a law. [Poster, Box 7, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]*

Some of the young women who worked with Jacoby during the installation of the Capp Street exhibition met with KRON to determine what they might want to see covered if they were to make a public service announcement. A reporter attended the meeting:

Herse, Solis, and Fulton were among 10 young moms who gathered last week to discuss what they should include in a 30-second public service announcement on teen pregnancy.... Most agreed that the TV spot shouldn't engage in scare tactics. It should be realistic, use real teen mothers and show how they take care of children, go to work and go to school. Teen moms wake up for 3am feedings and often stay up all night nursing fevers, like any new mother. Those responsibilities can be difficult to balance with education, but many youths who took part in "Expectations" found that motherhood gave them incentive to get ahead. [Fields 1997]

According to Luker (1997), schooling is a central element in teenage pregnancy: the belief, the faith that you can continue in school and even go on to college seems to be a deterrent to early

pregnancy. Certainly there were those young women we worked with who continued to have other children as adolescents. But many did not, and we could see early on some of the characteristics of determination, almost always mixed with a hope for higher education. These young women wanted to “make something of their lives” and care for their child. In one of her self-portraits Blanca Rodriguez portrayed herself in a graduation robe holding a diploma. Brandy Thomas, in the *Roof* documentary, had envisioned a similar future:

For myself, I want people to know that as a mother I am succeeding. I have a 3.7 GPA in 11th grade, I have as yet to drop out school and have no intentions of it—I plan to go to college. What they say about teen mothers is true for some, but not for all. They tend to say “most” and “all” and that’s just not true. [Brandy Thomas, Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

By the time of the *Expectations* project, she was in her first year at the University of California, Davis.

Code 33: Emergency Clear the Air

In [political theatre], the theatre makes comments on politics; in [theatre as politics], the theatre is, in itself, one of the ways in which political activity can be conducted. [Boal 1998: 20]

It was unseasonably warm as the late afternoon of October 7, 1999, moved toward evening, so much so that some youth used their white *Code 33* performer t-shirts as head coverings to protect them from the sun beating down on the rooftop garage. It was the Indian Summer evening we had hoped for during the last frantic three weeks of production preparations. The 200 or so performers, more youth than officers, had walked from the nearby Marriott Hotel convention center where they had gathered in their small groups—the same ones they had met with twice in the past two weeks—and planned the topics for tonight’s conversation. This conversation would be quite different, and although some of the first tensions had been worked out during the preceding meetings, over meals and with the help of facilitators and ground rules, this evening’s conditions of public exposure sparked nervousness, anticipation, and forced bravado, even for the police officers.

The caravan of odd fellows stretched over a city block. They walked mostly with their own kind—youth with youth, aged 15–19 or so, largely African American, wearing or otherwise sporting their brand new white t’s with the red and black *Code 33* logo, and officers dressed

stiffly, for the most part, in tight navy blue shirts and pants, sporting full street gear with belts, guns, clubs, and walkie-talkies.

Three blocks away at the City Center Garage the production crew, over 50 strong, was already in place and had been for several hours. The stage was elaborate: all entrances to the garage were monitored. At the main entrance, facing the State Building, an installation of photomurals by Cal State students and prisoners questioned the criminal justice system's racism and bias.¹⁷ The performance directors, stage, and technical crews were in place, and all had checked in by walkie-talkies to the director's booth in the elevator tower overlooking the top of the garage. With the plate-glass window in this tower removed, I could see the entire top stage and down onto the fourth-floor balcony. On the top floor, white, black, or red cars had been parked, grill facing grill, forming a semi-protective backdrop for 30 circles of chairs that sat vacant. The set and lighting designers worked on last-minute tweaking to the blue lights that would be triggered at sunset. Stage crews reviewed long lists of props and ensured they were placed correctly throughout the building. Technicians began turning on the 30 video monitors that ringed this first stage, perched near the walls overlooking the city of Oakland in all directions.

On the fourth-floor balcony that served as our second stage, preparations were in place for the press conference that would begin shortly with the mayor, state senator, police chief, and other city and county officials. Volunteers waited by food tables while mentorship organizations arranged their literature on the large red x-shaped table that dominated the space. Eight platforms covered with grass and framed with white picket fences would serve as conversation stages for the 80 neighborhood participants, who were huddled together to receive their red t-shirts and a last-minute briefing. Tech personnel adjusted online computers, video stations that would be manned by various youth in Act 3 of the performance, and made sure the large outdoor projector was working.

Deep in the bowels of the parking structure, below street level, Shane Hernandez lined up the low-riders that would exit the building as part of the first act, forming a counter procession with a similar group of six or so police cars, which were being staged three blocks away. Both processions of cars, radios and signals blaring, would circle the building in opposite directions forming Act 1, a cacophony of ceremonial sound from California's car culture and alluding to Oakland's recent media focus on the controversial sideshows, in which teens gathered

¹⁷ The posters were produced by California State University students and prisoners from Soledad Prison (from a class at CSUMB run by artist Johanna Poethig).

spontaneously and loudly on the streets to compete at doing dangerous and noisy stunts with their cars.

Unique Holland radioed me that they were leaving the Marriott and walking, as planned, toward the garage three blocks away. Holland and Arnold Perkins, director of public health for Alameda County, had led the youth and police in their final preparations for the performance. As soon as the procession left, accompanied by several volunteers, Holland and Perkins hopped into waiting cars to be zipped to the garage, where they would assume their places on the top of the building as two of three site directors, all reporting to me directly and responsible for the overall tenor of the conversations. Frank Williams, the color commentator from the *No Blood* project, was the third. Each, in his or her way, was a commanding presence; they were the best assistant directors I could have hoped for.

In the tower, I was connected by walkie-talkie to all those responsible for the performers and performance. Next to me, Russ Jennings was connected on a separate channel to all stage and tech crew, so he could provide cues for performance staging. On the other side, Sergeant Jeff Israel had a channel to the various groups of police—the ones in the procession waiting for their cue, the helicopter crew waiting at the waterfront, the chief’s liaison on the fourth floor attending the press conference, and the increasingly nervous officers patrolling the streets below. Together we formed the directors unit that communicated with about 100 volunteer personnel. I radioed Holland back: we were ready for them, there were no urgencies in sight, and everything would be ready to begin seating performers in under ten minutes.

The performance was starting smoothly, surprisingly so, after the chaos of understaffing had kept me up for most of the night. From the cab Holland radioed me again: in the State Building, across from the City Center garage, a “Free Mumia” protest planned for the past several weeks, one we’d kept a cautious eye on, seemed ready to move on the garage. Since many of us belonged to criminal justice and anti-racist list serves, we’d noticed Internet rumblings that our event might, indeed, provide an opportunity for media attention for the Mumia Abu Jamal cause. As Holland arrived at the garage she radioed me that a group of agitators had taken up a position across the street from the entrance to our performance, where over 1,000 audience members were starting to line up.

Just before the “Code 33” event got under way, about 150 students gathered at the Federal Building across the street for another type of performance—a protest for Mumia Abu-Jamal, who was convicted of killing a police officer in Pennsylvania. Youth from local high schools and area colleges hoped to pressure US Attorney Robert Mueller, whose office is in

the building, to investigate the Philadelphia Police Department in the case. Organizers said the protest at the Federal Building was not timed to coincide with “Code 33.” But after speaking in the plaza, some protesters marched to the garage front and blocked the entrance. [Lerman 1999]

Chanting “the roof, the roof, the roof is on fire” (from our prior performance), demonstrators pulled out prepared signs revealing their entry was not merely opportunistic but in fact planned. Our stage personnel looked down perplexed onto the street. Many of us were “Free Mumia” sympathizers ourselves. Our politics were probably for the most part indistinguishable from those of protesters. But the large number of police and television cameras proved too great a target.

The police, already nervous from the exposure of being assigned, some against their will, to the rooftop “performance,” began to react to the demonstration and the police procession parked their cars in front of the entrance. Greg Hodge appeared in the directing booth. He knew the protest organizers—we all did—and suggested we send out negotiators to see if they wanted to take a platform within the performance proper. They didn’t. Apparently they felt it more strategic to stay outside and try to disrupt the performance.

Chief Richard Word appeared in the directing booth. I had worked with Word for several years and across several projects starting when he was a patrol officer in East Oakland. Promoted to the chief’s position from within the ranks when Jerry Brown became mayor, Word had a reputation for listening and for his personal interest in young people. I had seen this close-up many times, in particular one night when he took a gang of youth planning team members and I cruising in a police van to look for a Sideshow. Now he conferred with Israel and me: he suggested the decision was mine, but he recommended we not proceed with the procession and simply move into Act 2, the conversations on the roof. He was afraid that unleashing the low-riders and police cars onto the streets in front of the demonstrators might cause even more confusion and the situation might get out of control. Low-riders were notoriously protective of their cars, and an accidental scratch from a protestor’s sign might cause chaos. I quickly, though reluctantly, decided: cancel Act 1 and begin admitting the audience downstairs.

As the audience began to appear on the seventh floor and spread out to surround the groups of youth and police already deep in conversation, there was no time to regret the loss of the procession, a loss I felt keenly over the next few weeks. What if I had been wrong? Perhaps the respected low-riders might have stilled the confrontation. But what if an inadvertent stumble

into a prized car had provoked a virtual street fight and the entire enterprise had been shut down?

Downstairs and throughout the performance moments of agitation broke out. At times a protestor would make it onto the roof and disrupt a conversation, or a police officer, aroused by his feeling of being overrun by out-of-hand protestors, would overreact aggressively at the front door. I later found out that virtually half of the audience, including a well-known local fire captain, Ray Gatchileon, was locked out of the performance when officers manning the doors decided there were enough people on the roof.

Agitators eventually made their way up to the roof and initiated their own impromptu dialogue with some police officers, momentarily upstaging the youth-police dialogue in favor of some real-life police drama, alternatively highlighting and upstaging the purpose of Code 33 itself—addressing the rift between the public and police. As one annoyed onlooker said, “Confrontation happens every day. Dialogue doesn’t.” [Baum 1999]

Upstairs as the production moved from preparation into production, a seamless one in the experience of the audience at the top of the building, many unaware of the protestors, I turned my attention to the next task, monitoring the conversations and the audience response. Now, in the few minutes when things seemed under control I mused on the conflicted nature of this performance. To create a work in life-like and massively public situations like this, you must be prepared to make decisions in the moment and have enough control over the stage to exercise those decisions.

Held in the same place, directed from the same elevator tower a scant five years later, the action for performers and audience was similar to that of *The Roof Is On Fire*: small group conversations, with the audience listening as they wandered from conversation to conversation. But this time the conversations were outside the cars, between the grills of cars pointed toward each other. the mood on this rooftop could not have been more different. As I looked down on the protesting group, now much diminished in size and marching along streets two blocks away, I mused on that difference.

After *Roof* passed through its beginning stages, a palpable calm set in. The sense of wonder, the quietude I felt even up in the directing booth was constituted of rapt attention, poignant revelation, and fading sunlight. The sensation lasted through the performance, with the audience unwilling to leave until the improvisational horn honking provoked a laughing, applauding, good-natured retreat.

How could I have imagined it would be the same this time? I had invited conflict into the heart of the performance. Now the fears and distrusts were no longer between performer—presenting a unified field—and audience. To be sure, there were performers—police officers, youth, and facilitators—who felt the willingness to explore youth/police conflicts in public created a kind of unity between performers. In spite of our careful staging efforts the divide between audience and performer was blurred and unstable. What they were all—community members, protestors, police, and youth—performing was deep distrust, crushing personal experiences, and the ongoing antagonism toward police that lives at the neighborhood level. They were performing conflict.

(Criminal) Justice for Youth?

That's where the problems come in. For no reason cops are just hassling people. They are not just being nice and polite; they are being rude and disrespectful. [Tierney Smith, Youth, Cops, Videotape transcript, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

If you go and talk real soft or try to be too kind, they take it as a sign of weakness and will just totally disrespect you, walk away. [Carletta Garrett, Youth, Cops, Videotape transcript, Box 6, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

During the 1990s, three themes in criminal justice were important to placing *Code 33* within the stream of policy deliberations: (1) the criminalization of youth, particularly youth of color, and the mainstreaming of those attitudes through media that resulted in policies like California's Proposition 21; (2) the shifting of government resources from social services to local law enforcement with moneys dedicated to youth crime prevention; and (3), in recognition of the strained relationships of police to urban communities, attempts to reconstruct this relationship and prevent crime through community policing strategies.

The Oakland Police Department began implementing full-scale community policing throughout the city soon after Chief Samuels took office in 1993. It was sold to a diverse and political citizenry as “a proactive philosophy of policing which is contrasted with the ‘911-response’ approach to law enforcement which has dominated US law enforcement for several decades” (Notes, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001).

Many, though not all, community-based organizations optimistically embraced a new planning process to bridge the chasm between police and community. The rollout of a full community

policing agenda under Chief Joseph Samuels (with whom we'd worked in the development of both *The Roof Is On Fire* and *Youth, Cops, and Videotape*) included establishing Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils with assigned beat officers and civilian police employees, called Neighborhood Service Coordinators. The neighborhood councils could be formed independently or organized by uniting with existing organizations—home alert, parent, school, church, service, and business groups.

The city was divided into policing beats that tried to account for cultural and neighborhood divisions as recognized by residents. An early report in our project files drafted by Oakland Sharing the Vision suggested: “It is critical that each neighborhood council be sufficiently representative of its community to allow for accurate identification of key public safety issues, broad public support for its actions, and comprehensive knowledge of what is going on in its community” (Letter, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001).

Community policing was an attempt to deal with critiques of police from poor neighborhoods of color and all citizens who feared a rising crime rate. But calling on police to be available on the streets (not in their cars), to create relationships with residents, to participate in citizens' meetings, and to work with youth in a more sympathetic way, the community policing agenda suggested a radically different role for police officers, one they were not particularly equipped for by virtue of their training. Midnight basketball and job training for youth might come under a newly constituted police role. But how was an officer trained in aggressive defense procedures supposed to suddenly turn into a youth councilor? Community policing required new training procedures for officers. Some officers by character or background were youth advocates, like Officer Terrance West in charge of the Sobrante Park Police Activities League and then-Captain Richard Word. They helped to shape a strategy incorporating our aims within officer training and other OPD programs.

Our target for attitude change was not youth, but police officers and the department. We developed and promoted the concept of youth-oriented community policing. In addition, we wanted an alternative and nuanced perspective on the conflict between youth and police as represented in mass media. Strategically this approach was at odds with some community organizations' position that any engagement with police should be oppositional. To organize at the policy level, one needs a complex set of strategies that cross lines between groups at odds with each other: one kind of approach for City Council presentations, another for various community constituencies, and still others for youth.

By the time we were ready to begin *Code 33*, we were well positioned by virtue of our past works as well as our extensive community, civic, and school-based connections, to engage the issue of youth wellbeing in local policing. We established an office at City Hall under Mayor Elihu Harris and managed through intense lobbying to maintain it as Jerry Brown became mayor. We wanted this presence for proximity to city and police and to introduce our youth-oriented activities, and the presence of numerous youth, into City Hall culture. It was an important link to our policy intentions and a natural legacy of our work on the Oakland Youth Policy Initiative.

We surveyed the current civic and police agendas to determine where we might align to produce a “larger than art” project. The city’s agenda to focus on youth, part of the Oakland youth policy process, and the police agenda of community policing were targeted. Working with Oakland Sharing the Vision, we developed a rationale and the broad outlines of a proposal that would support a broader youth voice in community policing. Although some of the newly formed neighborhood councils stressed the need to include youth, few youth were in fact involved. As we indicated in a proposal to the police:

This is a serious omission in a City with a large youth population, disturbing rates of violence, and a pervasive distrust of law enforcement officers. In response to the under-representation, Oakland Sharing the Vision will work with TEAM to create a massive public discussion on youth and violence, authority and security, in the form of an artistic performance (slated for fall 1999) that will bring awareness to youth participation in grass roots community crime-prevention. [Proposal, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

We presented our objectives to police chief: to create a training program for all 57 community policing officers, to document this program on video for future training, and to engage youth in the activities of the neighborhood councils and coordinators, bringing a youth focus to the community policing initiative. Our strategy, broadly speaking, was the same as in all of the Oakland Projects, to link art with public policy.

We began to build toward a large-scale multimedia public installation and performance that would consist of a series of simultaneous conversations between youth and adults on safety, crime, and youth’s relationship to the criminal justice system. Our first proposal stated:

Youth and police, seated together will talk spontaneously but follow their pre-selected topics. The audience and news media will interrupt the evocative light from headlights of

the cars to cast shadows as they witness the candid and authentic discussions. Many in the audience will be prepared, made aware of issues through media and Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils. This installation will contribute to a greater understanding between youth and police, as well as frame their mutual listening in the eyes of the community, media, law enforcement and public policy makers. [Proposal, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

The performance would be the signal event within a two-year trajectory of activities—all of which were, in my opinion, part of the whole. Drilling down into community, organizational, and police procedures, the project was constructed of a variety of building blocks: youth art workshops, police training through facilitated discussions between youth and police, collaborations with mentorship programs, and work with high-risk youth in community probation and court schools.

Training Workshops for Police

The Youth/Police Training Workshop series held in the spring of 1999 was a cornerstone of research for the *Code 33* performance. Framed as a trial training program, the workshops were held in an off-site police classroom at the downtown waterfront. The focus was on truancy, as at the time the school district and police department were considering who was responsible for enforcing school attendance as mandated by state laws. The relationship between youth and police was an important part of the truancy picture because youth who were picked up and returned to schools in police cars provoked increasing antagonism between youth and police. Oakland City Manager Robert Bobb and the Oakland Unified School District's Truancy Program partnered with us to fund, and recruit for, five weekly sessions, each two and a half hours in length.

The goal of the workshop series was to prepare officers for their part in the effort to reduce truancy, address mutual experiences of disrespect, and to strengthen police ability to communicate effectively with young people. Youth were identified by the Truancy Program and the Community Probation Program and were paid for their participation. Of course, our concern was broader than truancy, but this issue offered a platform to enlist the city and police support.

The workshops were facilitated by Unique Holland, *Code 33*'s youth recruiter, who was then 20, and Greg Hodge, executive director of the Oakland Child Health and Safety Initiative and a visible youth advocate, activist, and political figure, most recently an elected member of the school board. Eighteen youth and twelve police officers explored topics including schools,

families, and media representation, but the real content of the workshop was in the exchanges—puzzled, heated, and poignant—between people who existed largely as stereotypes for each other.

The opening conversation was dominated by the verbally aggressive police. As Rosa Chavez, one of the student participants, described:

I walked into the first session not really knowing what to expect from the police. I had many questions and I also walked into the room not letting go of all the bad encounters my friends and I had with police officers. At first things were very difficult, the police had to learn how to step down and listen to what the young people had to say. The youth had to not be afraid to speak their minds and not let the police officers dominate the conversations. [Student essay, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

At the second meeting, the groups were separated to explore questions that would shape the agendas for the next four weeks. Participating youth wondered: Why were the police officers forced to be here? Police are supposed to protect and serve, so why do we feel threatened and unprotected? Why do cops think we are selling drugs just because we are standing on the street corner? Why don't police believe us? And in the next room, the police asked: Why do the youth of Oakland feel that they are owed entertainment by the city? Why don't kids want to report crime? Why do youth drop out of school? Why do certain youths continue to associate with friends they know are committing crimes? Who is stereotyping whom? What's up with the sagging pants and the gold grill?

When the groups came back together to review their lists, police were stunned. Youth said that their relationships with the police were troubled, conflicted, or nonexistent. Although some officers regularly worked with youth, many more were hostile and their information about youth came from street-level confrontations. Respect, something both youth and police consistently said that they want from the other side, was missing from the equation. As one local news writer reported:

At the cops/kids session I attended, facilitator Unique Holland got the teens to list their grievances about cops—"intimidating and dominant," "judge youth by appearance," "overly aggressive." The kids, it turned out, were sick of being stopped, handcuffed and questioned. The cops said they were just protecting themselves: "If I'm by myself, I'll handcuff anybody I can," and "I don't know you. You might be arrested for murder. Once I know you, I'll take the handcuffs off." Their beef was the kids were making it hard on

everybody by objecting to being cuffed. The teens were amazingly forbearing—“But couldn’t you just explain it to us while you’re doing it?” and the cops knuckleheaded: “No. We need to secure the situation. Best thing you can do is cooperate.” That the two groups were terrified of each other never got verbalized, but it lay across the session like a malevolent cloud. [Due 1999]

Officers felt that the conflict lay in the fact that youth were not familiar enough with police procedure. Like stern parents, each youth question was addressed as something that could be answered by educating young people to the realities of policing. In reviewing the lists it became clear that both groups felt unfairly stereotyped, disrespected, and misunderstood, with a deep allegiance to their group’s identity. In the first and critical shift in the group dynamics, police began to grasp that the difficulties might not exclusively lie in the realm of needed “education.” This opened the door for increasingly honest, if difficult, exchange over the next weeks:

Youth: I just want to say, like, I think that there’s no right for you to threaten somebody with smashing their head in a wall or killing them or—you have no right to like, tell someone that! Officers are supposed to be trained to deal with all kinds of people without fuckin’ hitting them!

Officer: You don’t live in Pleasantville, either.

Youth: There’s other ways! People act the way they act because they live in this community where it’s dirty. Where they have to sell drugs to support their family or work at minimum wage jobs, and where they have been abused since they were little, or living on the street, without no food or being neglected! That’s the people who are in prisons. Why do you imprison people for the way you taught them to act, or for the only lifestyle that they had to choose from? If people, you know, if people had a choice to live the way they wanted to, they would not be born into poverty, they would not be born havin’ to sell drugs to support their family...If you was not a officer, and you had to live the way we had to live, dealin’ with all kinds of shit, I mean, you would not want to get treated that way.

Officer: Can I say one thing? Okay, I grew up in the projects of Washington DC and I grew up poor. So look at where I am today, because of my attitude. [Gross 2000]

The OPD was racially integrated, which only heightened some of the questions youth of color had for the Latino and black officers.

I felt really disappointed, because there are many police of color working for Oakland and they have no problem with beating on their own people. In one of the sessions we were

shown a video where a cop was telling a girl that if she didn't calm down he was going to smash her head into a glass door. After the video we were having a discussion about it, and many of the police officers agreed with what the police officer in the video did. I just figure that the police of color would try to help their own people, not keep the traditions of the police in the 60s, when people of color were getting beat, killed and treated like animals. During those times people of color were fighting for equal rights, but not the rights to kill and beat their own people. [Student essay, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

In the final workshop, the familiarity bred from repeated, witnessed, and carefully facilitated meetings yielded a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie. The progression was similar to what we'd experienced in *Youth, Cops, and Videotape*: police attempted to explain procedures, police were surprised (surprising in and of itself) at discovering the depth of animosity even among those youth they considered "the reasonable ones," followed by several weeks of hard work and growing trust. It seemed in the last week that a radical transformation of attitude happened: from the vast field of opposing camps, people began to recognize individuals as individuals.

In all our evaluation reports, people said that as they voiced opinions and feelings, felt listened to, and learned some things about each other, they ended up with a better understanding. Both youth and police stressed the shift in their perception of the other. For Rosa Chavez, who had so strongly voiced her questions about police tactics: "The good things about the sessions were that a safe place was provided for me to express my anger without getting into trouble or harassed by the police officers."

In the near-term, the workshop didn't, of course, change anything outside of the range of these particular individuals' experiences. But we had established a precedent for the city and its police to work in a different way with young people. We had developed a prototype training session. And we had invited community witnesses from schools and community organizations to record their impressions of the workshops, as a measure of transparency and to learn from their various perspectives. With participants' permission the workshop series was videotaped by Bay TV, a local cable channel which televised all five sessions. Its sister station, KRON-NBC, with whom we had partnered to produce our *The Roof Is On Fire* documentary, ran a series of lengthy news reports—18 minutes worth of the workshop—in the week before the *Code 33* performance. A 10-minute National Public Radio report was broadcast, and articles appeared in local papers.

The media coverage was part of a strategy to add import for participants. Oakland youth, we had discovered, were often eager to address perceived stereotyping through performing themselves. Officers also come from a performance culture, all the more so because of televised crime dramas and reality shows. The coverage also allowed the media audience, so used to witnessing conflict through crime reporting, to see a new perspective, interrupting the media stream on predatory youth.

Our methods had similarities to Augusto Boal's "Legislative Theatre" in Brazil, with its framing of legislative activity as theater, and to his "Theatre of the Oppressed," in which he allowed conflicts to enter the performative space, in most cases controlled from a single perspective of the oppressed. In our case we were trying to represent the conflict through the direct performativity of the actors on both sides. Workshop "actors" represented themselves as individuals in the context of social stereotypes portrayed daily in Oakland newspapers. Here one might compare Mady Schutzman's comment that "to engage in Boal's 'therapy' is to become situated in a space between the individual and the socialized category of all such individuals.... Boal's techniques point the way to awareness of the society's politicization of gender, race, class, family, and/or psyche" (1994: 152). As with Boal, the politicization of ethnicity and class (and in our case, age) was a driving force in shaping the work. Suspecting that my own shifts in perception over the course of the workshops might be shared, to some degree, by a broad audience, I hoped that the televised segments would present the community with a more intimate access to real people in the process of trying to understand each other.

Developing a youth-centric point of view, where one approached policy on the basis of how youth, rather than adults, saw things, was critical to the Oakland Projects. Questioning how young people felt was key to our work, and positioning institutional actors—from mayors to police to schoolteachers—to listen to them was the strategy. What we found out in *Code 33* was how very unsafe low-income young people felt, in their schools, in families, in streets, and from the police. Many of them didn't feel safe anywhere.

Youth, Neighborhoods, and Fear

During the video sessions, kids talked about being afraid—of cops, of other kids, the dealers on the corner ... in Temescal [where the North Oakland group did their filming] a white driver in her sixties slowed to let the multiethnic film team cross the street and then panicked when she realized there were an awful lot of kids near her car. She slammed on the gas and shot through the crosswalk, almost creaming three kids. Nobody seemed surprised. [Due 1999]

The rich network of adults that many of us grew up with—teachers, coaches, neighbors, local merchants, friendly beat officers—does not exist for today’s urban youth. Youth participating in our programs were often poor, mobile throughout the city at ages far younger than middle-class children, and at risk for dropping out of school. They had few adults they could go to with problems. Encounters with the police and probation departments were common. From an early age, they were caught in an environment that for them was highly threatening. When asked to investigate Oakland neighborhoods, including their own (a prevalent theme of our work was charting neighborhoods through youth perspective), they returned again and again to the issue of personal safety.

The need for mentors in Oakland was tremendous (one expert estimated the need in the 30,000 range). During the ten years of our work it was vividly apparent that, above all else, these youth needed long-term relationships with caring adults. Through our workshops some police officers did develop informal mentorships with youth, and although these relationships were not the point of the workshop, they were an important outcome. If youth had someone they could talk to in the midst of the dangers they faced in their neighborhood, it was at least a small part of a fragile network of support.

From our earliest projects the wellbeing, development, and education of the youth we worked with had to be an integral part of the construction of each work. Every project addressed these needs differently but in *Code 33* “mentorship” emerged as a major strategy and theme. We asked adults in our projects to mentor youth and invited them, as they were capable, into all aspects of planning and production.

For the youth/police training workshop we produced an officer-training manual on how to become a youth “ally.” We partnered with such organizations as Simba, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, the Boys and Girls Club, the Police Activities League, and the Mentoring Center, whose founder, the charismatic Marvin Jacks, had presented several times to students in our previous projects. City Manager Robert Bobb served as the honorary chair of our drive to recruit 100 new mentors at the performance. We promoted feature articles focusing on our partners’ work. One story was about Deyanta’e Newson, who had overcome a troubled youth and now worked at the Mentoring Center:

Newson’s drug-dealing father died during a botched transaction when Newson was 10 and his mother later died of epilepsy. He was reared by his grandmother. “I didn’t have the things I needed and got influenced by older young men,” Newson said. First arrested when

he was 13, Newson spent the rest of his youth in and out of juvenile hall. [Media Report, Code 33, Box 12, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

Newson's experience was typical of many of the youth we worked with and was why we decided to focus on mentoring in our performance. At the performance Newson was one of those who worked the mentorship sign-up table.

Workshops—in and out of school, in community centers, in probation centers, and on college campuses—were the second major strategy of *Code 33* that we hoped would fulfill our commitment to the individual youth we worked with. Youth development was not our sole mission; nevertheless, it was ethically impossible to work with young people without offering them substantial support and education. We did this not only through personal mentorships but also through an extensive program of workshops in art, media literacy, public speaking, and writing. Over ten years the goal of the Oakland Projects was to train youth in critical analysis, self-representation, and image-making abilities and support their progressively responsible roles in our performances and installations. During *Code 33*, we provided over 350 youth with workshops—sometimes partnering with existing schools and programs, other times producing the workshops ourselves.

The workshops varied in length from two hours to several weeks and reflected our partnership with organizations and schools. For example, *Code 33* participated in the Oakland Unified School District's Peer Mentoring Conference with a two-hour workshop on neighborhood mapping. Two members of team of artists designed and presented a one-hour workshop for 90 youth at Camp Sweeney, a treatment program for juvenile offenders. We were often called upon by other youth initiatives to offer arts-based workshops. At Brett Harte Middle School, for example, we worked with students in the Neighborhood Police Council to create a poster documenting their school survey on neighborhood safety.

The arts were widely recognized as attractive to local youth, and most institutions and organizations we worked with were already convinced of their value. The art college that I worked at became a site for workshops I conducted when school was not in session, ones that pioneered the college's later community outreach programs. In one all-day workshop for *Code 33* we introduced young people to multiple art-making skills, including sessions on mural painting, video production, sound editing, photography, and writing. At the end of the day, students presented their work to each other in a campus-wide installation: a temporary mural on the side of a building, a radio program, rap presentations, and photogram self-portraits, made by exposing photographic paper to the sun, with their bodies forming the black-and-white images

There was a reason to encourage young people onto a college campus, as surveys showed such initiations are critical to the formation of poor children's belief that they can aim for a college education.

Art was a means to teach other skills in addition to technical and compositional ones. Neighborhood analysis through drawing and video making, for example, was meant to encourage civic engagement. Youth strongly identified with where they were from and understood subtle implications of class and culture from neighborhood origins (the Flats, Dogtown, East Oakland, Ghost town, etc.). *Code 33* sponsored neighborhood-based art workshops to investigate the neighborhoods youth lived in. In one project offered through the Police Activities League, 20 young people worked together in small groups to map their neighborhood and to produce *Sobrante Park*, a seven-minute video on violence and poverty in that East Oakland community. In the video two Sobrante youth describe having guns pointed at them, in the street and in school. In a three-week intercession, we paired college students with nearby Oakland Technical High School students to create a short video and a poster called *Hot Spots* to use in community clean-up initiatives.

The most likely audience for youth workshops, and the easiest to recruit, were young people from relatively stable homes who were doing well in school. Even these youth were subject to stereotyping, and the majority of our youth recounted stunning examples of street-level prejudice. However, based on our goals we needed to reach those most "at-risk" with the criminal justice system, including youth from court schools, probation programs, and juvenile detention centers. We formed partnerships with the Alameda County Office of Education and Juvenile Probation in a variety of workshop initiatives: We created month-long Saturday workshops in photography and 15-week after-school art workshops for youth in community probation programs. We worked at Rock La Fleche, a court school, where adjudicated youth or those kicked out of high school for behavioral problems were ordered to complete their schooling. We taped a short radio documentary with the broadcast journalist Charles Osgood featuring interviews with youth in community probation program, after working with the youth to prepare them for public roles. Over the course of three years we developed multiple workshops, all taught by artists paid by project funds, an extended faculty we worked with over several projects.

Our most intensive involvement was with the Youth Planning Team (YPT), led throughout the first year of the project by Julio Morales. The YPT members were selected through a multi-tiered process. We consulted neighborhood groups, schools, and the probation department for nominations for an intensive training in August 1998. Twenty youth attended evening classes

over a two-week period at a local college. Ten of these students were then selected to participate as YPT members from September to May 1999. During this time, the YPT members met weekly in City Hall and engaged in art workshops, presentations on criminal justice issues, public speaking, race relations and conflict resolution training, and field trips. On one field trip we road in an unmarked police van with Captain Rich Word, soon to be promoted to chief when Jerry Brown came into office, looking for sideshows. The project had an open format, allowing youth to bring friends on a weekly basis, but new entries were not paid until they were able to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the project and a place became available for them.

In the summer before the *Code 33* performance we launched a major workshop initiative, hiring several local video artists to run workshops out of neighborhood recreation centers for eight youth production teams. These young people were paid stipends to produce and edit short video portraits of several Oakland neighborhoods for the final performance in October. Thirty-seven young people participated in workshops that focused on four underlying themes: trust, respect, safety, and communication. In surveys and opinion polls youth had voiced three main concerns: lack of things to do (recreation opportunities or jobs), transportation, and safety. These issues became the focus of the seven youth-produced videos for the *Code 33* performance.

“We had to walk through neighborhoods that weren’t too good to be walking alone,” said Rashaad Allen, 16, who worked with some classmates on West Oakland and the transportation issues residents have there. “It’s about how people don’t feel there is enough transportation in West Oakland,” said James Robinson, 17. “There’s not enough cabs, or BART doesn’t run fast enough. Sometimes people don’t feel safe if it’s late.” It’s an issue that seems trivial, but public transportation is the only mode of independently moving about the city for most teenagers. People feel safe for the most part, said Robinson. But he did point out that some of the people he interviewed said they felt some fear when they are waiting for a bus in unfamiliar neighborhoods. [Begay 1999]

The teams of students premiered their videos on August 18 at the We the People Studio of Mayor Jerry Brown in the Oakland waterfront area. We used the screening as a way to get police and youth together for a small trial of the conversations that would take place later in the performance. The writer and art historian Moira Roth wandered among the groups taking notes:

Evening, August 18, 1999

... There is a sense of highly tentative, speculative trust that could be withdrawn on either side at any moment.

“It all comes down to a matter of style,” a man comments assertively to a teenager. “It’s style on our part, but it’s style on your part, too. It’s a two-way street.” The man, a powerful-looking black Oakland policeman in off-duty casual clothes (other police in the event are wearing uniforms, complete with guns, cellular phones and walkie-talkies around their waists), is describing an imaginary encounter taking place late at night on an Oakland street between police and teenagers. He is addressing the equally tough-looking black Oakland teenager, wearing a headband and dressed in baggy pants, who sits opposite him. “Why are you guys out there? What would you do if you were a cop and someone ...” In the small circle of police and teenagers there is momentary silence. Eye contact. Tension. Who will speak next? The teenager stands up to demonstrate with a slightly ironic air—taking his hands out of his pockets—that he is not carrying a gun....

I go home deeply touched by the poignancy and ambitions of this project and by the fragility of the liaisons being made. [Roth 2001: 49]

The Production Process

Our youth leaders acted as ethical compasses from the beginning of the Oakland Projects, reminding us of critical developmental issues involved in supporting youth. Unique Holland was particularly present and vocal, and her work over the years with the Oakland Projects brought her to a position of primary authorship in *Code 33*, along with Julio Morales and myself. In her working notes from that time she inquired:

- 1. What will become of the young people from Youth Planning Team Police/Youth training?*
- 2. What will happen to youth after the video production this summer?*
- 3. Will we reassemble a youth team in September? We’ll need a group of sophisticated advisors at that point of the production to assume, among other roles, facilitators for the groups, the press team, etc. [Unique Holland, notes, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].*

These questions served an important integrative function in our production process. The art production was a part of a political agenda and representatives from diverse constituencies—city government, non-profits, youth, and police all had a stake in the performance. The continual questions raised by each were addressed by project planners and guided aesthetic decisions. Design elements for the performance, including stage sets and performance “scores,” were produced from a complex negotiative engagement that was fundamentally and broadly collaborative.

All this is not to say that community process overruled artistic decision-making. The aesthetics and quality of technical production were, like any artwork, qualities that I carefully guarded. They were critical to the success of the work. That means that everything in both the performance and stage set planning was filtered through aesthetic decisions: the lighting (in cars and on the top floor and the balcony), the video projection (on the 30 monitors and the large-scale projection of street scenes on the balcony), sound projection (David Goldberg's car-based installation and the dance music from the balcony), performances (quality of conversations from youth, police, and residents and quality of the youth dance team), stage design from entering exhibitions to both stages, and construction of all stage furniture. But much of the aesthetic success of the performance would lie in factors far outside the normal artistic purview.

Questions that arose during the production process were vetted by groups who made recommendations to me. A subject of much debate, for instance, was whether officers should wear their street uniforms. Over two sessions, a youth/police committee had decided that police should wear their street uniforms and gear in order to represent a typical encounter. In another example, as mentorship became an important theme for the performance, our graphic and stage designer Raul Cabra suggested a table in the shape of a large X on the fourth-floor balcony to accommodate a group of organizations recruiting for mentors, an action that served as an audience participation aspect of the performance.

One of the hot-button topics in media and communities as we entered the performance production process was the advent of the sideshow. The streets of East Oakland were sites for youth crowds that would assemble apparently spontaneously late at night in residential neighborhoods, race retrofitted automobiles, spin out, play loud music, and generally terrorize local people. Although most of the cars owners were not from Oakland, and most were older than the high school youth we worked with, the narrative of youth out-of-control again reached national media.

From the youth perspective, they didn't have enough to do; from the neighborhood perspective, the sideshows were disruptive and dangerous. Youth workers and police were trying to find alternatives, including carefully staged "sideshows" at sports arenas and vacant lots. Responding to this new wave of media criticism, our performance plan for the first act was to have a string of low-riders with radios blaring to circle the building in one direction while police cruisers circled in the other with sirens blipping. Art student Shane Hernandez organized a club of East Oakland low-riders who were pleased to participate. This first act would also entertain waiting audiences, because we knew there would be a jam of people trying to enter the building.

The selection of a site for the performance involved the politics of Oakland neighborhoods. The case was made to site the performance at Eastmont Mall, an almost-abandoned shopping mall in East Oakland that offered a dramatic site in its unused, partially underground parking lot. Since East Oakland was where most sideshows took place, we considered the impact of holding our performance there. From an audience vantage point, we were pretty certain that the choice of that site would limit our overall audience but attract more East Oakland residents. This precipitated a discussion in our production teams about who the performance was for—the Bay Area as a whole or East Oakland with its number of often-underserved neighborhoods? Youth from East Oakland would find the event more accessible, but it would largely exclude youth from North and West Oakland.

Our internal conversations were heated and based on our attempts to discern the right political as well as aesthetic choices. In the end, I decided to locate the performance on the same downtown garage rooftop we'd used for *The Roof Is On Fire*. This site was at the heart of the city, near City Hall as well as the Federal and State Buildings. It was accessible by public transportation to residents from schools, churches, and organizations in East, North, and West Oakland. It was somewhat disappointing visually speaking, as I liked the idea of designing for a new site. But I was persuaded that the center of the city would be perceived as more-or-less “neutral.” There was a certain poetic resonance to returning to the site of *Roof*, where youth themselves were featured, this time to confront a more troubling issue directly.

As the performance design took shape, we realized another overlooked “voice.” Community policing and other revitalization efforts were staged on a platform of empowering different distinct Oakland neighborhoods. Residents in these communities, represented by organizations including the Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils, were vocal and critical actors on the public stage of youth visibility. For the final performance, we began to organize both audience and, more importantly, performers based on neighborhood affiliation. The third act of the performance would include 80 members of eight communities to consider, through spontaneous conversations or “meetings,” their responses to the youth/police discussions in the second act on the rooftop. The stage designer Patrick Toebe created mini-stages for the conversations, turf-covered platforms with chairs surrounded by white picket fences laid out across the massive fourth-floor balcony. Even the choice of white picket fences—with their reference to suburban, not urban, lifestyles—was debated by the neighborhood leaders, who were organized by Garrett Dempsey. Dempsey had formerly organized neighborhoods for Jerry Brown’s mayoral campaign, and his work for us included developing a neighborhood-based audience for the performance. This was more than audience development; it positioned the performance as part

of an ongoing process of citywide neighborhood-based organizing toward community revitalization.

One of the key aesthetic criteria for this performance was the quality of the over 30 conversations that constituted the major narrative of the piece. If the conversations were unbalanced, agreeable to a fault, disingenuous, or so contentious that real exchange wouldn't be sustained, the piece would fail. Yet they weren't scripted, as in a traditional theater work, but shaped by prior conversation and, in the end, improvisational. Many things could influence the quality of the small group conversations.

Officers and detectives volunteered and were assigned to the project. One of the major inhibitions to a frank and open conversation was that public scrutiny is highly contentious in police culture. Trained to control a situation with their authority, letting their guard down was a challenging task in this unpredictable and potentially volatile situation. Youth, recruited from a citywide youth conference in July, presentations to schools, and through other youth programs, might be vulnerable by possible backlash from police they met later in the streets. We worked with community probation programs and court schools to ensure participation from adjudicated youth, who were also potentially vulnerable, although one might argue they were already under legal scrutiny.

We developed a rehearsal schedule and engaged 30 Bay Area facilitators, who were responsible in advance for establishing ground rules and leading groups in outlining their own conversation topics. We found a location—the State Building cafeteria—and brought in scores of volunteers to prepare meals for 200 officers and youth, who met in small groups to lay the groundwork for meaningful conversations during the performance. We needed at least two sessions to break down the barriers and get people into a mode of responsive conversation. They were kept in ongoing teams up to and through the performance.

The three sessions leading up to the production night—our rehearsals—were experiments in mass “youth/police” training on the model of our earlier projects. One of our YPT members, Neya Doeur, who had recently graduated from San Leandro High School, spoke to a reporter about her attempts to recruit youth:

The task was difficult at first, [Doeur] said, but got easier as more understood the event and brought their friends along. Workshops were held with the youth participants and police officers to begin choosing topics and raising questions. Starting a dialogue between the two groups took a lot of hard work and commitment on both sides, they said. “I found it kind of

hard to talk,” Doeur said. “It felt like [the police department] was giving me opinions that [they felt I should hear]. I’m trying to get them to admit that there are some corrupt cops out there and there always will be, but they never said that.” [Compton 1999]

Our job was to protect these conversations and create the circumstance that would allow for the difficult task of performers representing themselves and their cultures as honestly as possible while they explored uncharted and contentious territory. We readied ourselves for the unpredictable by making more and more advance preparations.

The production process for *Code 33*, although similar to that of *Roof*, was more complex, demanding, and unwieldy than any of the earlier works. The entire three-year project was lengthy, complicated, painstaking, and subtle in its interactions with public institutions, political figures, diverse communities, and activists. The majority of our time was spent positioning the work, fundraising, and providing youth development activities.

Positioning included developing partnerships with youth-serving organizations, two mayors (Elihu Harris and Jerry Brown), two police chiefs (Joseph Samuels and Richard Word), City Council people, school administrators, the police and the Police Activities League, the Alameda County Office of Education, and the Alameda County Probation Department. Although the base funding for our project was from a multi-year artist grant I received from the Surdna Foundation, we had an intensive fundraising campaign, receiving funding from national and local foundations, including the Oakland Child Health and Safety Initiative voted on subsequent to the adoption of the Oakland Youth Policy Initiative. The expense of the production, from technical rentals and stage personnel to production of stage furniture and props, was on the par of other large art performances from that time.

Incredibly, actual production planning for the performance on October 7, 1999, complex as it was, constituted only eight months of that total three-year process. We started planning in the early spring, recruiting artists and stage people for the performance design. A short-term Production Advisory Team of artists, police, community members, and educators was convened monthly in June, July, and August to review the performance design and ensure that it reflected the various constituency perspectives.

Project staff was made up mostly of volunteers, including myself, but there were small stipends for professionals (facilitators, youth recruiters, administrator and project manager, and stage design artists). A key group of 30 or so staff and volunteers reported to each other weekly and worked within and across project areas. The project was divided into areas of responsibility, all

mutually accountable, with little hierarchy of discipline or function: accounting and budgeting, donations, media relations, graphics design and production, stage set, props collection, police and youth recruitment, fundraising, website design, video documentary preproduction, press conference planning, and liaisons with the site owners.

Our new Youth Production Team, overseen by Unique Holland, now a college student, paired more developed teens with adult artists. For the first month or two they received weekly workshops covering press relations, photography, video documentation, audience development, performer recruitment, and computer technology. Then they began to branch out, assisting in various areas of production like helping design the rehearsals and making decisions on graphics. Most important, these youth were responsible for helping to recruit youth for the final performance and for framing the conversations with the police—for the performance and in preparation for it.

More and more of our labors went toward the night of October 7. We contracted with technology providers, developed complex three-channel communication plans, and lined up police cars, a helicopter, and 200 red, white, or black automobiles. We designed lighting for the performance that was to take place over sunset, created a sound installation for the audience entryway, developed an exhibition plan for student posters on criminal justice inequity, planned security and clean-up, and removed the window in the elevator tower. We secured parking; obtained donated signage, food, film, and banners; and lined up student transportation from their high schools.

Annicc Jacoby served as a media consultant to develop press goals, talking points, and manage the press the night of the performance. The legacy of our work with *No Blood/No Foul* was the idea of performances as forms of civic discourse, platforms to creatively air issues and formulate responses. Our press release, drafted with Jacoby's usual flair, framed the performance:

JOIN 150 Oakland Youth, 100 Police Officers, 57 Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils, Mayor Jerry Brown, Police Chief Richard Word, Oakland City Council, Teachers, Parents, Neighbors, and Mentors on Thursday, October 7, 1999 6:00 pm. Free to speak. Free of charge. Free to all. In this free public event, the role of the audience is critical. Listening is the first step to understanding. [Press materials, Code 33, Box 12, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

Performing Conflict

Downstairs on the fourth floor, before the performance doors opened, a press conference was in motion with the mayor, the police chief, several city and county elected officials, and the state senator from Oakland. Proceeding as planned, the press conference was part of the performance strategy to up the civic and institutional forces on behalf of greater awareness of youth needs, particularly with respect to criminal injustices. As each in turn spoke, they advocated for youth and for greater communication between youth and police in front of scores of cameras and reporters.

Mayor Jerry Brown, Councilmembers Dick Spees, Ignacio de la Fuente and Nate Miley, Police Chief Richard Word and Senator Don Perata were on hand, each emphasizing the gravity of the event and the potential that the conversations could hold, for both officers and youth. Chief Word stated his hope that the event would play a role in reducing complaints against police, reducing overtime and reducing crime. He noted that the connections made between the groups were "something I haven't seen before in my career." Mayor Brown asserted that the relationship between kids and cops "shouldn't be adversarial," and praised the idea of "try[ing] to get into the mind of another person, try it on for a while and find common ground." [Baum 1999]

As the audience entered the building, they were whisked on elevators to the sixth floor. There they walked up the final parking ramp toward the roof, through four cars playing a sound installation by David Goldberg, a combination of *Code 33* theme and loud rap music, symbolic of the teen cruising that so disturbed some Oakland residents. On the top of the roof the audience encountered swaths of red, white, and black cars grouped according to color. The 100 cars were nosed inward, and in the space created where their grills presented themselves, 30 small circles of chairs had been placed approximately 10 to a group. Sitting in these circles, dressed in white t-shirts, blue uniforms, or street clothes were the performers, approximately 150 youth, 100 officers, and their facilitators.

It was 6:30 and the late afternoon sun still played across the roof. In another hour it would be dark. No one but production staff really knew that the first act with low-riders and police had been aborted, as the audience did not know what to expect from the performance. Depending on when they entered, many audience members were aware of the confrontation with Free Mumia protestors at the entryway to the performance, but on the roof these appeared far below. Although an estimated several hundred people were not allowed by the police into the building,

in the end an audience of 1,000 roamed freely between the cars, rapt witnesses to the developing conversations.

Wandering among the small groups, city officials, neighborhood activists and parents listened in on the conversations. Sometimes humorous but often tense, the dialogues focused on issues such as racial profiling, power and harassment.

Officer Troy Jones told Frazier police are often on the defensive, especially in high-crime areas. "If I'm going to a liquor store where I've seen all this violence, all these drugs...in your opinion, how do you suggest I handle it?" Jones asked.

Matthew Williams, 17, suggested police be honest when they stop kids, rather than use their authority to intimidate them. "Tell us the truth," Williams said. "When they ask, 'Why are you doing this to me?' let them know." [Lerman 1999]

Video monitors perched on the walls overlooking the city, 30 of them evenly placed, acted as sentinels around the conversations. Each played a continuous loop featuring a view of a specific Oakland neighborhood made by our summer youth teams. From these walls you could turn away from the conversations and look down onto local neighborhoods, identifying the divisions of the city made by significant streets, buildings, or geography—the broad flatlands of East Oakland, West Oakland circumscribed by the cranes of the working harbor and downtown buildings, and the Hills. You could also look out, beyond the notion of neighborhoods, across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco, and beyond, to the Golden Gate Bridge, the Headlands, and San Rafael. To the north the Richmond refineries belched smoke. Even as you looked, however, you would hear youth.

Even though the characters of the neighborhoods described in the youth videos were different, all evidenced concerns with safety and transportation—fear being less resonant for those in more affluent neighborhoods. From the Hills to the Flats, the vulnerability of youth from poorer neighborhoods was clear in looking at these two key issues. But no matter which neighborhood you came from your mobility was limited by a deep sense of territoriality, the rules of which youth learned early:

If they know where you live, if they know that you've been living in that neighborhood for a long time, then they don't bother you because they know you've been living there. But if you're just passing by then they are going to think that you are an intruder in their neighborhood and they are going to start bothering you. [Student Maxil Munoz, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

In one instance a boy was dragged off the bus and beaten to the point where he was unconscious and lying underneath the bus. [Student Barry Joiner, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

I feel safe at times, because I know most of the people around there. But if I walk to another part of the neighborhood, I don't feel safe because you never know what is going on or you never know if somebody is out to get you or whatever. If you are on your way somewhere like school or out to play basketball, somebody might know you live in another area and they might just want to try to mess up your life or something just because they got miseries. [Student Khadfy Washington, Code 33, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

Code 33 was deeply integrated into a profound context of conflict that exists in Oakland as well as other major urban areas across the United States, one where class, poverty, and racism are enacted daily in small and large, personal and institutional manners. As we'd gone to great effort to engage the visible representatives of this conflict as actors to perform themselves, so too we understood how the audience members were not really spectators but played another set of roles in reality. There, on the rooftop, they came to a forum and found themselves onstage.

Circling the groups was surreal; conversations didn't stop when listeners left, and the decision to stay and listen to one group or move on to the next was a difficult one. The sense of intrusion—bending in close to hear someone speak from within a circle—lent a certain mystique to the function. [Baum 1999]

The narrative structure was loose, life-like, shaped by the agency of individual viewers who chose which group to listen to, whether to watch the television monitors, talk to friends they encountered on the roof, or stare out over the darkening city. There was time to take in information, reflect, and converse. There were different positions in the audience: some came as organizers invested in the issues and eager to engage in political discourse. For others, the agency provided by freedom of movement offered an illusion of spectatorship. In fact the audience role as witnesses and the dilemmas posed by conflicting positions, as well as options for movement, mirrored their residency in different communities: for some, the conflict was something they only saw in the media; for others, it was enacted regularly on their doorsteps.

The emotions within the groups ran from light-hearted bantering to tension, anger and frustration; long-held stereotypes that police harbor against youth will not be miraculously broken down in one evening. Though some questions were answered patiently, some, such

as what is a “justifiable” shooting, and why can an officer pull a gun on a youth in self-defense—but the youth can’t do the same—were treated with anger and miscommunication. One youth stating that “the police has this attitude that all the community needs to submit to them,” was countered by an officer noting that all they are asking for is respect. [Baum 1999]

For those of us behind the scenes, directing the stage and monitoring the doors and audience, the tension was palpable. Most of my time was spent ensuring a relative calm on the set and producing the conditions for the conversations to occur. In the tower overlooking the performance site, Russ Jennings continually monitored the entryways and technical issues. Jeff Israel oversaw the officer’s participation, the police helicopter’s movement and general security issues. I addressed the assistant directors, Unique Holland, Arnold Perkins, and Frank Williams, whose teams of youth assistants continually circulated to their groups, reporting back the progress of the conversations and anything arising with the audience members. Because the police were so controversial in many Oakland neighborhoods and because some of the people in the protest had made their way to the top of the roof, occasionally an audience member would try to intrude, only to be reigned in by an assistant director.

Directing the performance was more trouble-shooting than following a script. When the conversations were spontaneous, engaging, and heartfelt, it had a life of its own and my role as director was only to coordinate the whole, call key cues in the timing of the event, and preserve the fourth wall and other conditions that supported the conversations. For the most part, however, in this performance those sublime moments were few and far between. Conflict was always there, just below the surface and ready to erupt. In the groups it was manageable. Our facilitators were well prepared and the ground rules understood by all, so conversations could touch upon sensitive and heated topics without falling apart.

Officer: Obviously it [illegal use of force by police officers] happens, but I have never seen it.

Youth: It happened in Riverside to a young girl. What are you talking about that never happens? I get shot down, because I was reaching for something and you had ran my name and I have something on my record from four years ago, I get shot and that’s ok. You might not even loose your job. That’s how you are above the law. And you have to admit that.

Officer 2: Let me give you an example. A decorated cop, see? Fifteen years on the force. The whole 15 years, kickin’ ass.

Youth: That’s what I’m saying, Kickin’ ass the whole 15 years.

Officer: *I'm talking about a good cop. I didn't say he was doing anything against the law. Fifteen years on the streets. Everybody knows him in the department, everybody likes him, citizens like him. He goes out and makes a mistake like that. What do you think should happen to him?*

(Youth gestures to kick him out.)

Officer: *Yes, that's what I thought. That's your attitude. A good cop like that probably has ten more years on the street and he makes one freak'in mistake. That's how people are. Screw 'im, get him outa there.* [Code 33 video transcript, Box 11, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

Outside the groups, however, brush fires continued to interrupt as I would hear from the assistant directors' reports. At one point, Rosa Chavez, who was assisting Holland, was sent to the director's booth to express her frustration at a situation where two police officers left their group to confront an audience member. I turned to hear Chavez yelling at Israel, crying angrily through her complaints. After something was resolved, she left and Israel ironically said, "I guess these projects are working. Three years ago I wouldn't have stood there and listened to her yell at me."

As the sun set below the San Francisco horizon, headlights from encircling cars illuminated each group. The effect was as if citizens had stopped what they were doing in the middle of the street to sit in the headlights and discuss a problem. Blue lights strung in overhead steel structure that framed the top section of the roof and lights from the nearby State Building added subtle colors. As the sky darkened some groups became more reflective, the conversations more friendly.

Sometimes both sides just had fun. "What's up with the saggy pants?" Officer Pam Williams asked her group, drawing a sheepish smile from a young man who wriggled a little lower into his denims. "I don't want to see your behind."

"OK, bellbottoms was your style," replied another teen. "This is our style. This is the 90s." [Locke 1999]

It seemed each side became more vulnerable as the tension of being so visible in the public gaze and the unknown of the encounter subsided into recognition of each other. Some officers dropped their roles as "teachers" and became more open. Of course not all performers experienced the transition between power and vulnerability. A very real power difference was always there ready to erupt at any sign of disturbance, but there were also less disturbances as

the conversations matured, and even some audience members chose to dedicate their listening time to a single group, becoming part of the localized community of listeners and speakers.

Officer Leroy Johnson said police are often driven by fear, and that can translate into an explosive situation between an officer and a suspect—sometimes leading to a shooting. “I’ll be the first to admit, when we’re out there, we’re scared,” Johnson said. Sitting in the same group, Johnson’s wife—also an Oakland police officer—said her husband’s safety on the streets is her greatest concern. “My husband puts that uniform on every day, as I do. If anyone pointed a gun at him, I’d shoot ‘em,” Johnson’s wife said. “Do what you’ve got to do to get home, is what I tell him.” [Lerman 1999]

The stage directors cued me that the conversations were slowing down. It was now completely dark. Over a period of 15 minutes we slowly wrapped up this act, signaling facilitators to let us know when the group came to a stopping point in their conversation. Jeff radioed the police helicopter that had been waiting near the airport. We had to carefully time the over 200 performers on the top floor with the performers on the fourth and with the time it would take the helicopter to fly to us.

We cued the video technician to cut off all 30 monitors from their central switchboard, and replace them with the *Code 33* logo “test pattern,” signaling the transition to the next act. Blue lights turned to red and began flashing in the steel structures at the top-level roof. The helicopter made its first pass, a flood washing over the entire roof.

Loud music blasted up from the fourth-floor balcony and the commotion of people talking could be heard. In each of the thirty groups, a young person stood up, ripped off their white shirt revealing a red t-shirt with the *Code 33* test pattern logo. These were dancers, members of the group Culture Shock, who now shifted roles from group participants to transition leaders as they left their groups and danced their way through the crowds and down the stairs. On the east side of the building the audience crowded the perimeter wall to look down on the new stage three floors down. At the center of the balcony a large red X-shaped table was brightly lit by spots, as were each of eight risers covered with grass and fragments of fences. On each platform small groups of people sat in red t-shirts, representing the same eight distinct Oakland neighborhoods covered in the youth videos.

Overhead the helicopter continued to circle, its spot on the frenetic street dance from the thirty Culture Shock youth. Behind them a backdrop of Oakland streets, shot from car windows, was projected 30 feet high onto the building. The audience arrived from the top floor, accompanied

by the former youth and police performers. From the more choreographed youth/police conversations they arrived to the chaos of a block party.

There was energy everywhere and options for how to engage: listen to residents as they engaged in serious problem-solving conversation, watch the spectacle of youth hip-hop with pulsing rhythms covering the entire balcony, choose to be interviewed on video by young people sitting seriously under stage lights. Along the walls overlooking the street, we'd stationed computer terminals with youth staff to help audience members post comments directly on our website. In the center of the stage, the audience could sign up for their Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council or to be a mentor with one of our collaborating organizations. In the nearby covered garage they could inspect low-rider cars as drivers performed tricks for them.

On this second stage, roles were reversed—members of the former audience were now performers. The tables were turned, and police officers, youth, and production volunteers could listen to the responses from the eighty residents, covering the geographic and class spectrum of the city. The community became protagonist, implicated on stage as in real life, a player in the sometimes deadly and always confrontational relationship between police and youth.

Code 33 began in tension with audience expectations of explosive confrontations. The frame created by stage setting and audience gaze finally dissolved, in the second part of the performance, diffusing into “life itself” as people engaged in a block party.

The realizing that this is a step in a greater process of reconciliation and understanding was a point that many arrived at, though not all. One frustrated girl complained that “everything’s going to be the same right after we leave. No one’s getting any answers.” Another group was discussing the possibility that “you can’t expect everything to be great [as a result of the event]. You have to take it step by step.” In one of the pre-event sessions, an officer quoted former Mexican president Benito Juarez: “The direct mutual respect we give each other is the peace.”

With the increased focus on the antagonism between police and youth, especially with racial profiling squarely in the public eye, and the nationwide push towards trying juveniles as adults, it is hard to gain a perspective on the results that one performance event, staged for the public, can produce. Respect is not formed in an evening; it requires understanding and empathy. Perhaps some peace was gained on this night, but true transformation will be measured by activity on the streets. [Baum 1999]

In 1992 Augusto Boal was approached by the Brazilian Workers' Party to run for city councilman of Rio de Janeiro. He was elected and immediately founded his Legislative Theatre, with the intent "to help the spectator become a protagonist of the dramatic action so that he can apply those actions he has practiced in the theatre in real life" (Boal 1998: 2). Boal and the members of his theater company, whom he hired as staff, organized populist forums to articulate and subsequently institute needed laws, such as ones providing access for the disabled access and health care for the elderly. For four years Boal and his staff worked in barrios, holding council meetings in public squares, organizing theater productions as civic discourse, and forming ongoing community development organizations within nineteen neighborhoods.

As with Boal's Legislative Theatre, the drama of *Code 33* relied upon real people assuming the roles they played in life, with legitimate stakes in the event. Performers traversed roles several time throughout: some police dropped their impenetrable façade and expressed vulnerability and fear, some youth offered advice to officers. Some audience members leapt into the conversations to become temporary performers, and some retired to the fourth floor to sit on the platforms as members of residents groups while former performers listened to them. Boal discusses the importance of transitive roles:

The frontier between the actor and the spectator is no longer impassable because there is an exchange of duties.... It is the stable division of functions which has been transformed, as neither the actor nor the spectator plays the same role throughout the event ... the double role of all theatrical work has been preserved as the action always takes place under the control of a critical gaze. [Banu 1981: 6]

Like the other Oakland Projects, *Code 33* continued, one activity eliding into another. A year after the performance a 50-minute documentary, edited by Michelle Baughan, was premiered in the City Hall council chambers. In the video there is, as with the performance, no clear and uplifting resolution for the rift between institutionalized adult authority and youth so desperately in need of good parenting and decent living conditions. The video explores real life in the streets, where both youth and cops are murdered, and *performed life* on the rooftop, where some degree of relationship occurred, if briefly. The video is narrated by one of the officers, Hugh Davies, and one of the youth, Sara Chavez, Rosa's sister. These two formed a lasting relationship as he worked his way up the police ranks and she started interning in a city councilman's office.

In the packed council chambers, with representatives from the hundreds of people who worked on and performed in *Code 33* over the course of its three years, the audience watched intently

until the end of the documentary when the dedication scrolls across the screen. The video was produced in memory of Khadafy Washington, one of the youth from our neighborhood video teams, who was killed by an unknown assailant in the streets of West Oakland on August 4, 2000. He had just graduated from McClymonds High School, where he played on the football team. His mother, Marilyn Washington Harris, later founded the Khadafy Foundation for Non-Violence.

It was also dedicated to another young man, who found himself on the brink of life imprisonment shortly after the performance. The film is dedicated to the young man's then-uncertain future. For the next year several members of the *Code 33* artists and activists team mobilized to mount a successful defense for Shawn.

Years later, at this writing, I still hear often from youth involved in *Code 33*. Twice in the last several years there have been significant attempts to raise money and incorporate *Code 33*-type strategies into new forums between youth and police, the first one initiated by officers in the police department's East Oakland division. More recently a respected youth non-profit was given preliminary funding to come up with a citywide *Code 33* proposal that would include all street officers in OPD. So far these haven't materialized on the scale that many of us dream of, but at least the memory of and the hope for department-wide conversations with youth are still alive.

It is interesting to consider the possible influence of art in this process. How much of the successful completion of the *Code 33* project in 1999 was based on the determination by a large number of collaborators to complete an artwork, one they believed deeply in? Isn't it the purview of art to imagine the future and give a palpable texture and shape to it? In speaking of his refusal to participate in televising Forum Theatre by producers who wanted to pre-select the spectators, Boal said, "I proposed that we go to the streets to make forum theatre, but they would not accept that because you never know what is going to happen. You are creating a future and they want to reveal the past" (Taussig and Schechner 1994: 22).

Eye 2 Eye at Fremont High

The Oakland Projects continued through 2002. After the *Code 33* performance we met with the chief and his top staff a few times to make recommendations on training curricula and the establishment of a Chief's Youth Advisory Group. We were called on to present at events like the International CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) conference whose theme—Creating Safer Communities for Our Youth—was explored through small group

conversations between officers and youth and a panel discussion with government leaders to explore how police, the city, and artists could support a built environment that accommodated youth needs.

In each project we were never very far from the education system. Our organizing was often done through schools. Teachers provided ongoing support for some of our students. We'd developed curriculum on leadership, media literacy, and the arts. We were similarly engaged with criminal justice. The place these two systems came together in Oakland was in the court schools for youth on probation and living in group homes. I'd staged classes and workshops at Rock La Fleche School throughout the Oakland Projects and the school was always eager for art projects. After *Code 33*, an all-out assault on youth was in full swing. Proposition 21, the Gang Violence and Juvenile Crime Prevention Initiative, was on the ballot for the coming election. The law proposed an extensive revamping California's juvenile justice system by greatly increasing prosecutorial discretion as to whether a child is tried as an adult—taking the decision away from juvenile court judges, increasing penalties, and redefining gang designations. We created a several-session curriculum resulting in an all-day art event for the 85 students, on criminalization of youth and the upcoming vote.¹⁸

Our final performance of the Oakland Projects was also that spring, although our workshops and presentations continued. Rosa and Sara Chavez, who had worked with us throughout *Code 33*, approached us to do what they called a “Code 33” at their school. Fremont High was a massively overcrowded public school in the Fruitvale district of East Oakland. The Fremont students formed a leadership team to produce an event to “clear the air” between students, staff, and teachers. The idea of producing low-budget performances, looser in structure but having direct impact on specific problems was something I'd wanted to explore, and this was an opportunity to do that. In a sense it was coming full circle: *Eye 2 Eye at Fremont High* was like the *Teenage Living Room*, well produced but small in scale, a “hearing,” or, in this case, a problem-solving session staged as a performance.

Jidan Koon, a *Code 33* facilitator who worked for Oakland Unified School District Superintendent Dennis Chaconas's office, presented the project for district sponsorship. While institutions like OUSD might support us with staff time and small amounts of money, for the most part what we sought was to align with their policies in meaningful ways. In this case, we

¹⁸ Proposition 21 was passed by voters largely on the continuing vilification of youth predators in the media. It was the endpoint of a progressive government abandonment of youth at risk.

planned not only to “clear the air” between a group of approximately 100 students and faculty, but to provide a list of recommendations to the school district to make the campus a better learning environment.

Koon was the intermediary between the school district office, the school-site administration, and the Oakland Projects, led by Morales and myself for this event. Student leaders were articulate on a range of concerns about communication (there was none), the state of their facilities (locked bathroom doors seemed to top the list), and the quality of their education in general. They had an embattled administration that, according to students and teachers, called the cops whenever they were unable to cope. Like many inner-city schools, the students were policed by bullhorns in the halls and metal detectors at the gates.

Although our decisions on performance scale made a huge difference in the amount of labor required for this project, it was nevertheless not a small undertaking. Our field research at Fremont High began in February 2000 meeting with the principal, assistant principals, the chief of school police, student council and club representatives, faculty, and parents to identify desired outcomes. Students from prior projects who were taking our video workshop, led by Nicole Hickman, decided to interview Fremont students and faculty for a piece on education.

The performance was a series of three workshops. The first two were private, for participants only, and held in the school cafeteria. The 100 people who had volunteered for the project were divided into small groups, each assigned a facilitator. Led by Luanne Lucke Augberg, our facilitators were assembled from former projects and partners. Their role was to facilitate respectful communication of problems and thoughtful brainstorming of solutions.

The third workshop was our “performance,” held in the outdoor quad and witnessed by several invited guests from the school district and the City Council. It started after school on May 25, 2000, with live DJ music, food, colorful banners, and posters. The conversations were staged in circles, with performers dressed in brand new fluorescent orange t-shirts, with their sharp *Eye 2 Eye* logo, which matched the paint on the surrounding quad steps. (The Youth Planning Team, Holland, and I had stayed late into the previous night to paint the steps, everyone teasing me about my willingness to go to such extremes for the color.) Around the top of the steps rolling green chalkboards were staged in an allusion to classrooms.

The performers were problem-solvers; the performance a work session. As the groups launched into intense discussions, recorders selected by each group took notes. Periodically they ran to the nearest green board to record problems and then, later, solutions. We were impressed with

the scope of this on-the-spot research. Koon and I organized their comments on (1) the quality of interaction between students and teachers, (2) the quality of the interaction between students and administration, (3) the quality of teachers and teaching, (4) issues between students, (5) general school conditions including the academies and equity, (6) issues with facilities and equipment, and (7) security. Early that summer we optimistically sent the list to the superintendent.

The Fremont performers bonded over issues of equity and the quality of education: “teachers do not challenge students and have low expectations,” “too many unprepared substitutes,” and “unequal distribution of supplies and equipment to the academies.” Their solutions were simple, obvious, and quite possible to implement. They suggested their environment would improve if “teachers had prepared lesson plans for substitutes,” “bathrooms could have trash cans and automatic flush toilets,” and “the library could create a textbook sign out system where students were held accountable for lost or damaged books” (Student comments, Box 13, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001).

If there were administrative will at that school to implement even a few of the recommendations, a general sense of accomplishment for students and teachers would result. But Fremont High School was not an institution with the luxury of addressing its own culture. The district was facing charges of fiscal mismanagement and the lackluster school administration was rumored to be on its way out. Like many large institutional problems we addressed, the intractability was depressing, looked at as a whole. But looked at in terms of the individuals involved, the experience of actually creating something together and in the process airing unspoken perspectives was worth the effort. The creative “clear the air” strategy focuses participants on a two-fold project: unearthing problems and seeking solutions through conversation and, at the same time, making a performance together with aesthetic, pedagogic, and moral dimensions. The art frames and points to the value of its participants’ experiences.

What I learned in the Oakland Projects was the deep intractability of institutions. It is not small or inconsequential factors that have shaped the institutions that fail to support youth. It is almost inevitable that socially engaged artists will encounter, on their road from awareness of injustice to research on its causes, art’s relationship to programmatic, policy, and institutional change. At some point along that road the numbers of people who participate will become an issue, as will duration and substance of institutional partnerships. That is how I came to spend ten years on the Oakland Projects. To make art with deeper research and analysis, a larger numbers of voices engaged over longer times, with the potential of institutional rather than individual

transformation—these are issues of both aesthetics and politics. In some as yet undefined place they come together as a form of art.

Whether that artistic assault on large institutions is ever worth more than its value as a model for potential change, I am not sure. I know that with the Oakland Projects I came to the end of this particular exploration in my own work as an activist artist. These projects, taken together, have a shape, a scale, a quality of aesthetic vision that for the most part satisfies the artist in me. As institutional and urban-wide interventions, they were successful in their time and to some extent live after in the memories of the complex and extended family of hundreds of people who worked on them. I think what kept many of us motivated to work was much more than the performances or installations. This was where we lived. These were our friends and, for some of us, our family. Unique Holland and I began thinking about a book on the Oakland Projects almost a decade ago, and in our first attempt at a book proposal she tried to articulate the sheer “life-likeness” of work we called art:

Time is a critical component of this work. ... Daily time is spent working with youth and watching them develop under many different influences—graduating or not, having babies or not, going to jail or to college. Time spent in conversation, countless conversations more or less public ... [and] countless, constant meetings. Meetings that took place in unusual settings sometimes, many of them impromptu. Going about life you'd run into a co-conspirator and engage with an idea or an image—over meals, napkins used to chart out plans, 'walking the lake' in Oakland where one could expect to encounter one or more people connected to the projects. ... It took time to generate the web of relationships that seem, in retrospect, to be the very work itself. [Unique Holland, notes, Box 1, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

But as attempts to change the school system or police training permanently, it's hard to trace impacts other than small ones—a curriculum here, a shift in training focus there. Our recommendations to the police, while well received, often faltered on our inability to lead the effort over time in an institutional culture that is, top leadership's favorable disposition notwithstanding, unprepared to do so by its mission, resources, staff, or structure. In trying to find traction for our strategies in ongoing programs and practices, we found that most public institutions do not have resources needed to sustain youth engagement. The Chief's Youth Advisory Group was formed for a short period of time, but the department was surprised to hear from us the amount of support required—after-school pizza, rides home, follow-up reminder calls, and so on—to ensure youth most in need could participate.

For more permanent initiatives like the Oakland Youth Policy, ones you can point to as sustained policy accomplishments, these are rarely the singular result of art, and quantifying the impacts resulting from art isn't easy. It's a phenomenon I've termed "Teflon effect"—you lob a change idea and it rarely sticks, sliding down the surface of programs designed for other ends. At least, this is what happens when you work, as most artists do, from the outside. If you are willing to dedicate years in a position of institutional leadership, or to develop your own non-profit organization, you can make significant changes, as I know from my work as an educator. But in this event, is one an artist or does one become, fundamentally, something else?

The Oakland Projects were definitely situated in institutional contexts allied with those empowered to make concrete institutional changes. A series of social forces conspired to create an opportunity for artists to work closely with civic leaders. Two mayors and two police chiefs supported these art productions. Politicians were regular attendees at events and made media statements on our behalf. There was widespread public pressure to provide better education, more safety, and more positive opportunities for young people. In this social and political environment, in a city where one quarter of the residents are under the age of 21, we artists experienced a rare access to public institutions. Such opportunities do not an art form make, but one cannot overestimate the importance of those moments when leadership and community align on important issues and welcome artists into the public sphere in meaningful ways.

CHAPTER 3

ART AND PEDAGOGY

After five years as an undergraduate in zoology and two as a graduate in psychology, my college trajectory changed when I met Judy Chicago. Her combination of nascent and self-taught feminism, professional arts practice, and compassionate mentorship diverted me from pre-medicine to the CalArts MFA program. There I met Arlene Raven and Allan Kaprow. It seems appropriate to begin this final chapter of my thesis, whose subtext is pedagogy, with these two teachers who shaped how I came to think about art. In a sense, they form one of the “deep history” narratives of the Oakland Projects. Because both of these mentors contributed writing to *Mapping the Terrain* (Lacy 1994b), the book I was editing coincident with the Oakland Projects, I will investigate how their thinking from that time and earlier contributed to the pedagogies of that work.

Allan Kaprow and Herbert Kohl

In a metaphorical sense we could begin the Oakland Projects in 1968 in Berkeley, California, when educator Herbert Kohl and Happening artist Allan Kaprow co-directed an arts and education experiment called “Project Other Ways.” This is not a conventional beginning, this meeting of Kaprow and Kohl—I was a zoology major at that time and knew neither man—but it serves as both pedagogical and relational starting point to my work in the 1990s in Oakland.

The late 60s and early 70s was a banner moment for theories and experiments in education, equity, and democracy. In 1964 Kohl, then teaching in the New York public schools, founded the Open School Movement, based on his lifelong commitment to social justice and the importance of education to race and class oppression. After attending Harvard as a working-class Jewish kid in the wrong kind of sports jacket (as he later told me, referring to the stark confrontation with class he experienced there), and receiving distinguished fellowships at Oxford and Columbia, Kohl chose to work in public grade schools in Harlem. In 1967 he published *36 Children* while engaged in school reform and the pragmatic politics of teaching and learning.

At the time Kohl and Kaprow were launching Project Other Ways, Paulo Freire was promoting radical ideas in education and democracy that were much more dangerous in Brazil, and his ideas had spread throughout Latin America. In 1968 he wrote *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (published in English in 1970), one of the most influential books on the praxis of education and class struggle, also referenced by many visual artists today. A few years later Austrian-born

Mexican resident Ivan Illich published *Deschooling Society* (1971) as one of a series of institutional critiques that called attention to the ineffectual nature of institutionalized education.¹⁹ “The current search for new educational *funnels*,” he wrote in his introduction, “must be reversed into the search for their institutional inverse: educational *webs* which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring.” (This comment offers interesting comparisons to Allan Kaprow’s later call to “de-art art” and its institutions.)

Kaprow was an interesting art partner for Kohl. Although at that time quite recognized internationally for his Happenings, he had strong ideas about education himself. Most writers on his work suggest Kaprow was not political, but in fact his real site of protest and advocacy for change was the art world and what he perceived as its irrelevance in places where it could be quite important, like schools. For him, the question was: in what ways is art meaningful to society? In the beginning of his career he advocated for art’s potential radical and transformative usefulness to education. As curator Eva Meyer-Hermann has indicated: “In his lectures in the 60s, Kaprow outlined concepts and plans—including the makeup of academic boards—for high school and college arts curricula. And he saw elementary schools as the place where artist role models would find the greatest acceptance” (Meyer-Hermann 2008: 79–80).

Like many activist-provocateurs, he was sometimes zealous in his proselytizing and impatient in his desire for change. His short-lived tenure on the Pasadena Art Museum’s board is a case in point. He put forward suggestions—radical even by today’s standards—to “reclassify all its departments as ‘educational,’ to provide financial support for local artists, and to engage them as educators in the museum and in local schools” (Meyer-Hermann 2008: 80), and then resigned when his suggestions were not adopted. He also believed the museum should engage more in “outreach” work, including classes in local schools, prefiguring the movement toward museum education, an institutional step of relevance to the development of social practices.

According to scholar Jeff Kelley (2004), Kaprow’s interest in education and Zen Buddhism led to student debates in John Cage’s influential class on the possible relevance of play and experimental art experiences to learning. Because of his philosophical departure from what he perceived as static institutions, like museums, Kaprow needed other locations and framings for his Happenings work. Classes and small group settings became one place he worked, and we,

¹⁹ I first became aware of Illich’s work when I was a premedical student, after reading *Medical Nemesis* (1975), a scathing attack on Western medicine that popularized the concept of iatrogenic disease with detailed statistics on postoperative side-effects and drug-induced illness.

his students, were his participants. “By the late 1960s,” Kelley writes, “Kaprow had developed the Happening into a form of philosophical inquiry that was inherently experimental, encompassed a wide range of subjects, and was enacted as a matter of the participants experience and not the artist’s theory” (Kelly 2004:142).

Kaprow always looked to sources outside the arts, and one of the writers who influenced his thinking from an early age was John Dewey. In the early to mid 20th century, Dewey’s pragmatism, particularly his writings on the intersection of culture, experience, and social equity, was foundational for later pedagogy theorist-teachers in the United States who advocated educational reform as a way to create a free democratic society. Many artists working in social practices today also cite Dewey as influential. Kelley (2003) discusses his impact on Kaprow in the introduction to Kaprow’s *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*:

Dewey was as inelegant as culture itself, for what he had said was that the arts, as practiced in the industrial West, had set themselves apart from the experiences of everyday life, thereby severing themselves from their roots in culture and human nature.... [This severance’s] effect on the modern arts had been to idealize “esthetic” experience by assigning it to certain classes of culturally sanctioned objects and events.... Because the meaning of life interest [Kaprow] more than the meanings of art, Kaprow positions himself in the flux of what Dewey called “the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience. [Kelley 2003: xii–xiii]

Although Dewey’s ideas about art were quite dated for the late 60s, his advocacy for a praxis that included culture, education, and politics was fertile fuel for the interdisciplinary curiosities emerging among visual artists at the time. Exploring such ideas through the development of conceptual and performance art, these artists (among whom I include myself) laid the foundation for projects like the Oakland Projects and other works now categorized under the rubric of “social practices.”

Kaprow approached school reform, if it could be called that, through the lens of how visual art experimentation—essentially a form of knowledge production akin to playful research—could shake up things in conventional education. In a move that was one of many forays into the borderland between life and art, Kaprow applied for a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to explore how bringing artists into schools to teach Happenings and other new forms of art might change teacher education and curriculum. After being unsuccessful in finding an institutional sponsor on the East Coast, he was introduced to Herbert Kohl, who had recently resettled in the Bay Area and was teaching in the Berkeley Unified School District. Through their partnership,

they found an institutional “home” to receive the funds, and they opened up a storefront in Oakland called “Project Other Ways.”

Kaprow, still living in New York, was restlessly exploring new forms of art, and by this time, according to Kelley (2004), he “began to call what he did ‘un-art,’ which suggested the decamping of art into life. He wanted to be in life as an artist—or as an artist might if not constrained by professional protocols. Thus, the process of ‘un-artisting’ represented nothing less than the deprofessionalization of the arts” (Kelley 2004:143).

At the storefront Kaprow and Kohl convened teachers, administrators, and students, pairing them with artists, poets, and architects, to explore ways to use art to promote academic learning across disciplines. This particular type of art/education curricular exploration was prevalent throughout the 80s and created a platform of knowledge in the early 90s, when activists in California were battling to keep (or seeking to return) arts to Oakland schools.²⁰ Kaprow, whose original intention with the grant was to explore the contingent, playful, and non-associative strategies of Happenings applied to educational venues, describes one such experiment in his essay “Success or Failure When Art Changes”:

There was a sixth grade class in one of the Oakland schools whose kids were considered unteachable illiterates.... Some of them came to our storefront with their teachers one afternoon. We had just been given a number of cheap Polaroid cameras and film, and I invited the kids to take a walk with me and snap pictures of anything they liked.... Mostly they seemed to prefer graffiti on the sidewalks and walls of buildings. I wondered why, if they were illiterate, they were so interested in words, especially sexual ones. [Kaprow 1994: 152-153]

He suggested that the children take pictures of bathroom graffiti, and the project evolved into several sessions of drawings and, eventually, texts depicting their own histories and material realities. “After a week, a guarded enthusiasm replaced shyness and a core of active literacy began to emerge.” In another project, he and Kohl collected outmoded Dick and Jane readers and worked with the youth to deconstruct the centralized “whiteness” of the narratives and reconfigure them in personal critiques of then prominent racism.

²⁰ In various studies James Catterall demonstrated the value of the arts in enhancing school site mathematics learning, offering one of the strongest cases for returning the arts to K-12 education (see Catterall 2009). Shirley Brice Heath’s studies on after-school arts programs (e.g., Heath 1998), which were widely disseminated in the early 90s, influenced foundation funding streams for projects like the Oakland Projects that were a hybrid between youth development, arts, and classroom education.

Eventually, however, Kaprow and Kohl parted ways, given their fundamental differences in temperament and goals. No doubt their tensions reflected, as well, the clash of very different worlds: the New York intellectual art avant-garde, of which Kaprow was an acclaimed if idiosyncratic figure, and the Oakland/Berkeley streets—radicalized by the Black Panthers, the Free Speech Movement, and a long history of labor organizing—to which Kohl was drawn. Particularly in the 70s, “high art” culture was perceived as elitist by the left and on-the-ground organizers, and although Kaprow strained against this elitism, the two men located their rebellion differently, a difference also reflected in political art from that time. Their work together called for a reconciliation of complicated ideas from the visual arts avant-garde with the pragmatic needs of social and political transformation as perceived by activists. Kohl’s experience with racism and class oppression, radical politics, and his familiarity with black politics/culture was learned on the ground²¹ and in the trenches of public schools.

Kaprow recognized of course that the gendered or racialized subject carried an extra burden of prejudice, and he was sympathetic to and took it upon himself to learn, particularly, about gender politics. But fundamentally he came from a position of male, middle-class, Jewish-liberal enculturation. (Many of our conversations revolved around this essential reality: the ground from which he perceived the world was a relatively privileged one.) Although radical in his own field and sympathetic to the various liberation movements afoot at the time, Kaprow did not come by his knowledge of these issues from the same deeply lived experience. (Knowing Kohl, I suspect that he would have been quite impatient with Kaprow’s street naiveté.)

The political left in Oakland perceived itself in a war with mass perception, and various movements of the time—anti-war, black power, feminist, student—demanded allegiance from followers. At a moment when representation itself was at stake, with serious political implications for some, for Kaprow to enter an on-the-ground activist experiment in social change in a radical and racialized community as an artist interested in “play” was perhaps more of a challenge than he realized. Similar fault lines had to be negotiated during the Oakland Projects, although certainly cultural awareness and the arts in community movements had eased the situation in the intervening years.

²¹ Kohl, an early and consistent advocate for racial equality, had attended the Highlander Folk School, founded in the 1930s to educate blacks and whites in defiance of segregation laws. There he met Rosa Parks and became involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1970, after parting with Kohl and Project Other Ways, Kaprow moved from New York to Pasadena, where he joined the faculty at California Institute of the Arts, itself an experiment in artists' education in the tradition of the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. Social change was more of a theoretical than a pragmatic endeavor in discussions between CalArts faculty and students. There Kaprow could continue his engagement with education without the friction of radical political critique on race and class. Kaprow's classes at CalArts, structured simply around the students doing "Happenings" and discussing their experiences afterward (in a model that he said he'd adopted from feminism), could be seen as a laboratory to explore his interest, from Dewey, in foregrounding the pedagogy of individual experience.

Judy Chicago and Arlene Raven

About four hours by car up the road from CalArts, at Fresno State University, a very different educational experiment was taking place, one in which I participated. The artist Judy Chicago held a visiting faculty position there and commuted from Los Angeles to launch the Fresno Feminist Art Program in fall 1970, the first such program in the U.S.²² Aligned with emerging second-wave feminist principles, Chicago's intention was to provide an environment where women could explore gender identity through art-making, apart from the framings of "masculine" perspective. Her teaching methodologies borrowed from other movements in California culture at the time, including the human potential movement and Freirian ideas of empowerment through education reform.

Chicago had little in the way of educational theory to draw on, as she was an artist by training. More to the point she was specifically interested in women's oppression and few educational or political theories touched on this key (for Chicago) theme. The psychodynamics of gender oppression were central to her teaching. Using both consciousness-raising and a form of encounter group (influenced by the Gestalt movement) to challenge what she considered negative conditioning, Chicago intuitively explored the relationship between the personal and the political with her students (see Chicago 1975 for an autobiographical account of her own struggles). Chicago proposed to invent her own studio course for women in an off-campus site. She was free to create inventive teaching strategies and curricula based on her understanding of what it took to become, in Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) words, "an independent woman." Years later, feminist theorists of critical pedagogy (until the 90s almost exclusively a male

²² The 15 students in the Feminist Art Program were Dori Atlantis, Susan Boud, Gail Escola, Vanalyne Green, Suzanne Lacy, Cay Lang, Karen LeCocq, Jan Lester, Chris Rush, Judy Schaefer, Henrietta Sparkman, Faith Wilding, Shawnee Wollenman, Nancy Youdelman, and Cheryl Zurilgen.

province) would draw upon the curricula created in Chicago's and subsequent women's art programs as an important source of practical strategies in women's education.

Chicago's notion of pedagogy, like those of others interested in education and democracy, was that student learning took place in a historical, social, and political context that must be acknowledged in the curriculum and was critical to the development of a fully emancipated person. As John Dewey said in *Democracy and Education* (1916), a democratic society "must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes" (Darder, Baltonano, and Torres 2003:1). Change comes first from within, and women would, Chicago felt, demand an end to their oppression when they truly understood how oppression worked in their individual experience.

In a major departure from art teaching at the time, Chicago supported collective endeavors, from carrying drywall and renovating a studio together, to making art. Part of her critique of art had to do with gender, power, and the myth of the individual genius artist, almost exclusively masculine in gender. Collaboration was emphasized in the classroom, and rather than being penalized for working on art together, students were praised. Relationality between women was a critical site for unlearning the destructive behavior between women in the service of a social goal of equity. Chicago organized curricular components around women artists' history and literature, consciousness-raising, critique, and studio practices. She taught women how to alter their environment symbolically and practically, through carpentry, and pioneered a form of critique that encouraged a personal and experiential reading of work. Through her work at Fresno, which she continued at CalArts, Chicago accomplished the task of gendering higher education in visual arts and made a substantial contribution in feminist perspective on what was later to become known as critical pedagogy.

Just one year after she initiated the program at Fresno State, Chicago joined a team of progressive women artists and educators at CalArts that included Miriam Schapiro, Deena Metzger, Sheila de Bretteville, and Arlene Raven. They led a series of feminist educational ventures in programs across the school, encompassing art, design, critical studies, and literature. In 1973 Raven, Chicago, and de Bretteville (who were all important mentors for me) founded the Feminist Studio Workshop, a college-level alternative educational program, and—shortly after—the Woman's Building, a collection of women's cultural organizations and businesses (see Linton and Maberry 2011) that included the Feminist Studio Workshop. I had served as a graduate student and teaching assistant in de Bretteville's Women's Design Program in 1972

(when I also met Raven), and soon joined my teachers as a faculty member in performance art at the Feminist Studio Workshop.

West Coast feminism in the 70s evolved differently from the East Coast, resulting in part from the convergence of particular feminist artists and educators in the many art colleges in the Southern California region. Feminist politics was prominently expressed through cultural and educational ideas, which in turn led to specific forms of theorizing. The visible feminist art programs (which attracted media attention locally and nationally) within higher educational institutions produced a feminist politics framed around learning and unlearning on both personal and societal levels. This foundation in pedagogy and social change activism helped place the West Coast feminist art movement in the radical feminist (though not socialist feminist) camp and led to its focus on social change and public art practices.²³

The Feminist Art Programs were a bit utopian and grew out of the belief that alternative institutions by and for women, free of structural bias around gender, were critical to full social and political equity. These institutions were also part of a larger progressive education movement that recognized that existing institutions limited emancipatory ideas and strategies. The Feminist Studio Workshop sits within the history of such noted open school initiatives as the Highlander Folk School, Illich's Intercultural Documentation Center, and other experiments in progressive education that featured experiential learning, problem solving and critical thinking, collaborative learning, and education for social responsibility and democracy.

The revolutionary nature of this endeavor is clearer when one remembers the context. Lise Vogel suggested in 1974, "Only a few artists, critics, and art historians have attempted more radical critiques of the questions involved when one approaches art as a feminist." "The class content of art is generally misunderstood or ignored," she contended, and "art works tend to be analyzed as objects without social function, context, or content." As an alternative, she proposed: "Feminist art historians and critics can make this art live again as . . . an integrated response to the realities and relationships of human society." (Vogel 1974: 34)

²³ Kathleen Weiler (1988) has criticized liberal feminist analyses for their tendency "to ignore the depth of sexism in power relationships and the relationship of gender and class." An approach more closely tied to socialist feminism, she indicates, sees "that schooling is deeply connected to the class structure and economic system of capitalism . . . and that capitalism and patriarchy are related and mutually reinforcing of one another. In other words, both men and women exist in interconnected and overlapping relationships of gender and class—and, as feminists of color have increasingly emphasized, of race as well." From this perspective, the Feminist Studio Workshop seems more radical than liberal, although its work on the overlapping relationships of gender and class was underdeveloped, as was common in that era.

Within this context, the pedagogical projects developed by Raven, Chicago, and de Bretteville were indeed radical. In her essay “Word of Honor” (1994), Raven describes the feminist art community in Los Angeles in the early 70s:

Individuality and common qualities were symbiotic in creating the principles of this community. We were women. We were art professionals. We shared a sense of social justice. We believed in the possibility of social change. We were reacting against both broad social and specific professional issues, with defined and measurable goals ... our notion of common good centered on ideals of equality. To effect this, we believed it imperative that we reclaim the history of women artists, develop an art of personal expression, take art to where a broad audience lived, and link our idiosyncratic experience to a possibility of cultural transformation in gender, racial, and class roles. Ours was a purposeful community—self-created, self-conscious, and self-critical.... Our processes prefigured the emerging public art practice today that moves fluidly among criticism, theory, art making and activism. [Raven 1994: 163]

Raven became the chronicler of the fragmentary and evolving montage of ideas from conceptual and performance art, social justice movements, critical pedagogy, and feminism that defined both feminist art and feminist art education, as well as West Coast feminism in general. The expression of her ideas through her writing was a condition of her time (influenced as she was by the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War protests) and her identity as both a woman and a lesbian. Spanning the dual contexts of art and critical pedagogy, with attention to the relationship between experience, community, context, and ethics, Raven’s work in many ways prefigures strategies that informed the Oakland Projects.

First, Raven’s teaching and critical practice emerged out of a deep respect for personal experience and how community supports individuals to play out their life trajectories in meaningful and ultimately ethical ways. Her very choice of how and about whom to write and her relationships in the classroom exemplified this respect. As the feminist art pedagogy theorist and artist Peg Speirs recalled:

Arlene believed in teaching by example. She sustained a sense of openness and a degree of humility when working with students, seeing each as a person and not just as a student. Arlene believed in customizing education by getting to know her students and working from their interests.... Arlene created community in her classroom by establishing a climate of support where students talked and listened to each other about their work. Arlene’s sense of

community carried into her writing as well and ... [she] would weave different voices with her own and include her whole community, acknowledging all the voices that contributed to a project or idea. [Garber 2008: 130–31]

Approaching community as self and self as community led to specific teaching strategies that exemplify other best practices from educational theories of the time. At the Feminist Studio Workshop, faculty developed alternative approaches to student work, including small group critiques (the student artist and one, two, or three faculty members) that allowed for the relaxation of the performative elements of larger critiques common in art schools at that time and the emergence of personal biographic themes, which formed a complex layering of meaning covered by social silences. As scholar and artist Elizabeth Garber explained: “With the practice of art criticism in art education at the time emphasizing formal and expressive properties of art to the exclusion of understanding connections of art to cultural and social phenomena, feminist art criticism introduced to education gendered perspectives, plural and complex approaches to art, and a model of respect for differences” (2008: 126).

Raven began her writing and her teaching on the specific conditions of women’s lives, including her own and in particular, early on, the violent rape that radicalized her just before she came to Los Angeles to teach at CalArts. (Her courageous testimony was one of seven stories that Chicago and I collected for the narrative to *Ablutions*, 1972, the first performance on rape from a feminist perspective). Women’s experiences of violence, for instance, were rarely talked about outside of therapists’ offices but often emerged as meaningful to the “reading” of individual works. The political analysis of women’s experiences and their relevance to the public sphere generated a critical approach, and pedagogical practice, of valuing autobiographical revelation, leading to an international body of artwork on violence against women, whose nature as art was initially obscured by its relationship to the issue itself.

Including personal life experiences and their relationship to the public sphere (in terms of class, race, gender and so on) suggests an embodied and contextualized approach to art-making in which the artist is somewhat decentered. This calls for different strategies: How does the artist enter a community “conversation” and participate ethically within it, taking account of his/her own subjectivities? What is it exactly that the artist is “doing”? For feminist artists in the early 1970s the tasks included a fundamental deconstruction of gender, within the self and society, followed by a reconstruction. At a conference on women, arts, and society in 1973, sociologist Elizabeth Janeway stated:

I believe that the way we use personal experience to create a new image of woman is closely allied to the work of the artist.... art is the way in which internal experience is formed into the image which is comprehensive to others. It is a basic process of communication, which established for one human being the interior reality, the lived experience of another; and this is what is demanded of us today. [Janeway 1974: 14]

Of course even in 1973 it was apparent that the emphasis on gender in the movement produced false commonalities. To begin creating a new social reality out of the individual's experiences meant connecting the personal body to the social body and in the fissures, ruptures, and contradictions discovering a new idea of equity. Questions of voice, agency, and identity became the fabric of an angry rebellion from the totalizing whiteness in both early feminist art and critical pedagogy theories, fostering critical debate in these two fields. Although there were ongoing conversations and projects at the Woman's Building that engaged race and class issues, the political zeal around gender prioritized this politically. Raven (1994), who was one of the feminist art writers who struggled early on with the intersection of oppressions, put it this way:

A dilemma arises when the vision that moves most social systems—that of cooperation toward a perceived interest in the common betterment ... is vague rather than broad.... In the early seventies, spokeswomen defining 'the women's community' emphasized commonality and ignored pluralism, inconsistency, variability and diversity. [Raven 1994: 164]

Like Kaprow in his work at Project Other Ways, feminists like Raven saw a commitment to experience as fundamental to the educational venture (an idea that goes back to Dewey), at a historical juncture when the nature of the public was being redefined in terms of equity. As ethical theorists, however, Raven and Kaprow took different pedagogical paths: on the one hand, Raven reached out toward a broad vision of a transformed sociopolitical landscape; on the other, Kaprow retreated to an intimate examination of individual experience.

In seeking a completely new way to understand and frame gendered reality—indeed, to even suggest differences in male/female experiences at that time was ridiculed—Raven expanded her sources far beyond the traditional art historical references, drawing on theorists from sociology, theology, feminism, and even ecology, and mixing the “voice” in her texts to include multiple viewpoints. This interdisciplinarity was part of the 1970s moment when challenges to knowledge construction were dematerializing art and “new” forms were emerging that were eclectic in their inspiration. As Tanya Augsborg (2008) explains, interdisciplinary theory is helpful in understanding Raven's approach:

My own understanding of interdisciplinarity draws from two oft-cited scholarly definitions of the term. The first is from Roland Barthes: "In order to do interdisciplinary work it is not enough to take a 'subject' (a theme) and to arrange two or three sciences around it. Interdisciplinary study consists in creating a new object, which belongs to no one."... The second definition has been forwarded by [Julie Thompson] Klein and William H. Newell: interdisciplinary studies may be defined as a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession.... Thus, for feminists like Raven, the study of women's lives, which includes the study of women's art, requires the expansive frameworks and strategies associated with interdisciplinary. [Augsburg 2008:110]

Valuations that promoted art and writing about it were affected by prejudices against women held in other sectors of public life. By redefining the sources for evidence, practice, and theory interdisciplinarily to construct new knowledge, the private links to the public in feminist art through the bodies and experiences of individuals, which in their aggregate create an idea of "common good." Private experience is re-imagined through the collective wisdom of different modes of human endeavor, understanding, and experience. For example, my whiteness is understood through sociological and historical data and the political policies resulting from race, as well as the lived experiences (and critiques) of people of color.

Feminism was one of the many stimuli in what Lucy Lippard (herself a feminist) called "the dematerialization of art" (1973). Forces within the arts were blurring boundaries between, for example, theory and practice, and between artists, curators, and critics. Roles and practices were being deconstructed, political agendas uncovered. At CalArts and later in Los Angeles, the ambitious cultural intervention based on gender politics took place simultaneously with the invention of conceptual and performance art. Feminist concepts were particularly suited to performance art, where contextual social and political events might generate an immediacy of embodied responses. Raven not only touched on these issues but helped frame the post-modernist idea of "crossing over" through genre-bending practices. In her book *Crossing Over: Feminism and Art of Social Concern* (1988), Raven suggests:

Painters dared to perform and write books. Scholars risked poetry and political analysis. Artists chose video, performance, artists' books, costume and clothing, conceptual art, and decoration as their media. These new genres developed against the background of social ideologies infused in an art which wanted to affect, inspire, and educate to action as well as please. [Raven 1988: xvii]

Over time Raven developed her individual pedagogical insights contextualized by feminist politics into nuanced ethical notions of the artist in the public sphere. She expanded on the reciprocal relationship between critic and artist, foreshadowing today's more fluid artist/curator and artist/critic practices. "Here," she said, "the line between art and criticism blurs" (Raven 1994: 160). Raven saw herself not as a critic apart, passing judgment on the success or failure of an artwork, but as a member of a community. For her, critical writing "adds to the experience of artworks—data and insights that will place them in literary, geographical, historical, critical, political or thematic contexts" (ibid).

In essence, critical writing itself was not only an expression of a personal and politically contextualized relationship between artist and writer, but also an exercise of relationship of criticism/language to the artwork. She stresses that this relational approach to criticism should not be seen as simple advocacy, but rather as part of a more complex evaluation of the artist's conscious or unconscious intentions and the impact of the artist's work on numerous and multiple points of reception, toward the end of human freedom. Her position as critical advocate, expanding on the artist's meaning and exploring the implications of a specific artwork to a larger social justice project, suggests that for her what was at stake went far beyond an artist's career success. Art, as Raven knew it, was a philosophical endeavor in a historical lineage of critiques meant to lead to some form of personal and/or collective emancipation.

The critical context is part of the concept of "community." Unlike standard definitions of community as individual with common interests based on location alone ... the community that consists of artist and audience or artworks contains, as well, the commentative structure in which the audience and artist may view the process and product of art making. This "critical" component is present whether or not it is discerned or declared.... I struggle to gain an understanding of artists' intentions and to assess their fulfillment within the audience. [Raven 1994: 161]

"Word of Honor" is, in the end, an essay about ethics. Raven, Kaprow, and other progressive educators of the time were deeply concerned with how their personal actions and their work fit ethically into a larger notion of society. They believed that reflection on personal experience constituted learning, in turn empowering (though their terms would be different) students. Jennifer Gore (1992) suggests that "a danger in the use of empowerment rhetoric" in critical and feminist pedagogic discourses lies in a lack of reflexivity. By this she means:

a tendency to neglect the ethical—one's relation to oneself. That is, these discourses rarely address ways in which teachers, students, or the theorists themselves need to style or discipline their gestures, postures, or attitudes.... This neglect of the ethical brings us full circle to the institutions which integrate critical and feminist discourses, primarily universities, and to the differentiations made in the academy and within the discourses themselves. The focus is generally on the broader political questions of interests and institutions with, especially in some discourses of critical pedagogy, little attention to self. How then does the rhetoric of empowerment connect with the practice of pedagogy? [Gore 1992: 67]

Gore argues that this is problematized by the institutional settings of such sites of (potential) empowerment. Critique of institutionalized practices of gender inequity led Raven, Chicago, and de Bretteville to leave CalArts and start the Feminist Studio Workshop. Although the formation of any new program inevitably carries with it some of the legacies of its former institution, questions of ethics pervaded the Los Angeles feminist art education programs. Even in the “classrooms” of Kaprow’s individual performances—operating in this sense as mini-pedagogical moments, where individual experiences are reflected upon in group settings—feminists brought up the gender implications in the work they co-produced.

In “Word of Honor” Raven suggests that the critical context for an artwork, created by the language of the critic, is itself part of the artist’ community. Writing about Raven’s ethics, Jenni Sorkin (2008) discusses the personal/political commitment to the decision to lead one’s life according to a notion of public good:

This bias gives way to a particular kind of aesthetic that was promoted by Raven and her colleagues at the Woman’s Building. I would call this ethical lesbianism—women advocating for social change, creating activist works and championing social causes through the visual and performing arts. Anti-nuclear activism, anti-pornography, anti-violence, the teaching of tolerance, the de-mystification of the lesbian body, rape advocacy and awareness— all of these issues were deemed compelling by artists during the first decade of the Woman’s Building.... Indeed, Raven’s entire critical and pedagogical practice can be seen as consciously ethical, informed by autobiographically inflected writing transparent enough to offer a healthy dose of self-expression within the realm of her aesthetic choices. [Sorkin 2008:93]

While aspects of this critical praxis are applied today to a range of public and community arts, the feminist legacy of this thinking is relatively unrecognized, and the critical connection Raven

made between feminism and publicly engaged art remains relatively unexplored. I have explored this in various brief published commentaries:

At a [2008–9] conference at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, I was struck by a lack of reference to, or visceral awareness of, the social conditions that birthed earlier feminist performance work. The conversations between the work of older women (those who came of age as artists during the 70s) and younger women (in their 30s, more or less) seems focused on the body personal, as symbol, as site of knowledge—important aspects of the feminist art project to be sure. However, the second and often forgotten part of early feminist performance art had to do with the body in public: encouraging discourse, engaging audiences, and challenging civic policies and practices. Feminists who specifically embraced activism ... have since been categorized as “public” artists, disconnected from our origination in radical feminist performance art. We were propelled into public space by a feminist critique that was also part of the general development of performance art. [Lacy 2009: 39]

Political and activist concerns have always existed in art, but they have become more important today in the visual arts. A legacy of this moment and intersections between art, the public, and pedagogy can be seen in current social practice projects. Progressive education brought up such questions as: How is women’s identity socially constructed, particularly through education, family practices, and cultural expressions; what role does individual psychology play in “unlearning” destructive framings; and what kind of curriculum supports emancipatory self-empowerment? In the arts, the questions included: What is the importance of identity in art production; what is the role of art in social change (e.g. the deconstruction of mass media images); what other identity constructions—other than the artist as heroic individual—are available to artists? and how is public context important to the meaning of any art? These questions informed our approach to the Oakland Projects as a series of interventions into public pedagogy, infused by personal commitments to mentorship within an elaborately conceived learning environment—also called a work of art.

Pedagogies in the Oakland Projects

The Oakland Projects were not the only art in town dealing with youth culture during the 1990s. A flurry of art, often paired with youth politics, accompanied the increased attention to this population in California. The Alameda County Office of Education attempted to return art to the public schools, where it had been virtually eliminated in prior years for budgetary reasons. A very few high school principals supported arts organizations and artists in providing curriculum

inserts or after school projects. Most of the art projects with youth, however, came from non-profits who developed skills in arts as a form of citizenship training. Youth-produced billboards, videos, and murals addressed a variety of youth-specific local issues, some as general as stopping violence and others directly political, as in the campaign against Proposition 21, which increased penalties for crimes by youth. Political youth organizers saw art as a way to mobilize and educate youth about their rights and on key issues.

Taking our projects as a whole, the pedagogical interventions and actions we created were possibly among the most complex, although these projects constituted just one component within an extremely diverse and energized cultural production in Oakland (see Knight, Schwartzman, et al. 2006). When framed as art, rather than youth development or education—a distinction whose borders we continually explored—they offered an example of one of the most developed explorations of community, youth leadership, and public policy in visual arts practice at the time. Even among collaborators there were differences of opinion on what, in the end, was more central to our mission—making an artwork, addressing a large public, or working more on an educational mission.

It was precisely this edge I was interested in, encompassing such questions as: When does art disappear and the artist become an organizer or non-profit leader? Can experimental art be “educational” for the public and remain viable as art in the context of emerging art practices? Might our curriculum in the classroom at Oakland Technical High School in 1991–92, and our subsequent high school and college level curricula in other projects, be considered as one part of a broader and more ambitious pedagogical (and simultaneously art) initiative? In that case, was I an artist or a teacher? These questions directly related to Kaprow’s (1994) discussion of *Project Other Ways*: Where is the line between art and life and when did one cross over?

In *Performing Pedagogy* (1999), Charles Garoian explored the various ways in which performance art operates seen within a teaching-learning context. Addressing my projects, he observed:

Lacy’s public projects demonstrate a participatory democracy wherein citizens are acknowledged as public intellectuals capable of taking responsibility for determining the quality of life in their families, neighborhoods, and communities. What is curriculum? What would curriculum look like if it were not circumscribed within the schools? How would students’ learning be affected if its form and content were determined through a community discourse? What role does art play in the development of community-based curriculum? Is there an aesthetic dimension to curriculum production? How does curriculum function as

performance art text? How does a performance art curriculum facilitate civic education? Questions such as these expose the curricular implications of Suzanne Lacy's community-based performance work. [Garoian 1999: 14]

By thinking about the Oakland Projects as art, through the lens of applied and theoretical public pedagogy, I aim to broaden the base of knowledge for social practices in art, which often flounder between theories difficult to implement within the complexities of real and substantial communities, on the one hand, and on the other a simplistic and non-critical art that is at the very least reductive, if not palliative. I turn to critical pedagogy in part because it is a body of textual knowledge that has never strayed far from its application in the classroom, and thus attempts to theorize a practice sited in individual experience but global in its ambitions for change. In addition, for most of my professional life in art I have explored media critique (beginning with media interventions on violence against women). Given the extensive role of mass media in what critical pedagogy theorist Christopher Robbins calls “anti-public” pedagogy, how the media frames youth and produces public “knowledge,” resulting in public attitudes and voting practices, is impossible to ignore (see Robbins and Lacy 2013).

Throughout the Oakland Projects we asked: What do we (the complex groupings that formed our local culture in the Bay Area in the 90s) think about young residents of the region, and how does that perception affect their needs? How are youth “framed” within public discourse? As Greg Hodges states in an interview in the film *No Blood/No Foul* (Baughan 1996), “How do we think about young people? Are they problems to be fixed, or folks who can score a point?” In a sense we can see the Oakland Projects as a classroom of mutual call-and-response, involving questions posed and answers given by young people themselves, a reciprocity of learning leading to empowerment not unlike the classroom of mutual inquiry proposed by Freire (1968).

Tying “visual art” to “education” has a troubled history, at times embraced (as with Kaprow and his colleagues in John Cage’s class in the early 60s and in the recent “educational turn” in visual art) and at other times distained (when in the 80s “training art educators” in colleges seemed to be an opt-out system for those who could not “make it” as artists). Yet visual art as research and a producer of new knowledge, recently embraced by academics in higher education,²⁴ links one field to the other. Since the 60s, notions of the avant-garde in visual art have promoted art as experimentation in materiality or meaning. Conceptual art, in particular, made the case for art as

²⁴ In this thesis I am making the argument that one can see the ten years of the Oakland Projects as art-based research, a premise that underlies the PhD by Practice programs explored in some institutions today.

a form of research, with performance art, developed around the same time, being more a matter of investigating experience itself, rather than representing it.

Beginning with this idea of research, let us see what it offers as a means of understanding the Oakland Projects. We can then move on to formations around the concept of curriculum and the ethical and aesthetic issues that arise in attempting to assess, in a reading of Kaprow's (1994) article in *Mapping the Terrain*, the "success or failure" of the work.

Research as an Art Practice

I approach new work with a primary question: What do I stand to learn here? This covers both art-related questions (such as how the current state of inquiry in art, touching on issues of aesthetics and desire, fits into my evolving practice) and broader concerns (such as the equity issues arising in specific communities and populations). Although in many ways they overlap, for the purposes of discussion my questions can be seen as directed at two sites of reception: the art "world," including art education, and the immediate social and political issues under investigation. As the project progresses and more people join, my question becomes: What do "we," both collectively and as individuals, stand to learn? Each new topic, each experience revealed by the young people we worked with, produced a public to address, and new partners who might shed light on the issues.

My art often addresses fundamental inequities in a given site. I am drawn to the areas where physical and psychic violence are a part of economic disparities. In any project I begin with the belief that human rights should guarantee, and politics implement, a social order that promotes and protects equity among its citizens. It is important to trace the human and personal impact of injustice and to try to understand the complicated social and political systems that preserve it. In the case of the Oakland Projects, my colleagues and I were led to explore systems of incarceration and adjudication, public education, health care, state and federal political systems and the ways in which local systems supported a neoliberal agenda that excluded youth.

How inequity is defined in a given culture—its causations, the place it holds in constructions of social organization, and the experiences of affected people—and how it is remedied are the subject of much social theory, although varied approaches are problematized and often contradict each other in proscribed actions. Although change in one person at a time is a viable approach, and one often adopted by artists, I am more interested in how perception operates within different publics and how they can be supported to work toward a "common good" through public pedagogies.

All this might seem self-evident, but it seems important to lay out a starting point. Allowing challenges into the process of the artwork's formation is fundamental to my practice (although difficult to implement personally in the midst of an artistic construction). Clearly, the concept of changing one's artistic expression because of outside critique does not fit well into art traditions. But the capacities for self-reflection are critical to the praxis of action and theory and run throughout progressive education literature. As stated in the introduction to *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*: "Within critical pedagogy, all theorizing and truth claims are subject to critique, a process that constitutes analysis and questions that are best mediated through human interaction within democratic relations of power." (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2003: 15)

My research methodology is a combination of field research—gathering opinions and perspectives and figuring out the relationships between local institutional programs and policy approaches—and more traditional academic research. As part of this process in the Oakland Projects we looked for people who could add to the total picture, organizations that would strengthen our developing analysis, and institutions, like the Oakland Unified School District, where we could effect some small changes. Within an aggregate of publics that included youth workers, politicians, educators, and community residents, could we, as artists, develop artworks that both supported youth in developmental learning while serving a mutually identified need for public advocacy? Our research led to the production of a variety of "publics" who, along with a large number of "actors" with a stake in the game, constituted the dimensions of participation. (I will return to this issue of producing publics below.)

A key point in my work is reciprocity and the establishment of a respectful mutual learning environment that underpins and produces the artwork. This might be seen as a form of action research (or participatory action research), defined as "research initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a 'community of practice' to improve the way they address issues and solve problems" (en.wikipedia.org; see also Cammarota and Fine 2008 on youth participatory action research). Action research, coined as early as the 1940s to address the contested position of objectivity in social sciences field research (a debate the outlines of which we can also trace in social art practices), takes into account the impact of the researcher on that which is studied. More importantly, action research assumes and manages these "biases," regarding research as part of a practice of cultural or social reform.²⁵

²⁵ This concept is often watered down in projects that are undertaken by researchers as research, wherein the outcome of publication must continue to address issues of quantification and verifiability common to the sciences and social

An important task in the early phase of research involved sorting through competing methodologies, institutions, and theories to form a position or set of positions for the project. What constituted the “right” kind of activism was quite contested. Although we balanced delicately on the knife’s edge of competing positions—such as how to implement truancy laws versus supporting after-school programs, or how to support youth and police mentorship (through programs like the Police Activities League) while teaching youth how to manage their rights in police confrontations (through organizations like Cop Watch)—our projects were based on youth advocacy and a belief that poverty, violence against youth, and racism were root causes of the problems faced by (and often ascribed to) youth. We were not “neutral,” but we wanted to operate outside of pre-existing factionalisms.

During the ten years of the Oakland Projects, as our research moved forward, we paid attention to advances in related disciplines: sociological research on specific issues, such as the relationship between teen pregnancy, family violence, poverty, and schools; progressive political analyses of juvenile incarceration and its history in slavery; deconstructions of media coverage, especially its role in forming public response to issues and resulting public policies (as in Governor Pete Wilson’s anti-teen pregnancy campaign); and informal interviews by developing supportive environments where youth could feel free to discuss their lives. We met with organizations and politicians to understand the complexities of local issues and their relationship to a national political picture. My colleagues and I continued to learn, to frame and reframe the issues, by listening to personal experiences, youth advocates’ analyses, and reading progressive theories on subjects ranging from community policing to immigration reform. The output from these investigations was instrumental in our formation of the work.

Forms of Curriculum

Five areas might be seen as elements of our expanded pedagogy: (1) the local media and its messages, and the counter-messages we developed; (2) the curriculum for formal classes and workshops in sites where these are traditionally delivered, including schools, conferences, and training programs; (3) youth development activities, including mentorship, allies for youth, and so on, drawn from that rapidly growing body of research/action; (4) informal pedagogy delivered through community organizing, advocacy work, and meetings with key

sciences. I have participated in a university-sponsored technology research project framed as action research, which had very little of what I would consider real community engagement in the outcome of a publication.

constituencies; and (5) the mass public performances and installations that highlighted the work but were not all of the work.

The Classroom of Public Messages and Counter-Messages

In the early 90s popular culture imagery constituted a growing battlefield between youth and the adult world, a false “war” that hid the increasingly dire social conditions for youth as a result of increasing income inequality in the state. For 20 years there had been a progressive dismantling of family income and of support systems for the poor and for youth of color as class divides widened. The insights on this shift from the sociologist Mike Males and the cultural theorist Henry Giroux were important in our formation of a broad base of cultural inquiry and critique. As Christopher Robbins comments:

Researchers and advocates like Giroux (1996) and Mike Males (1996) provided relatively rare instances in which children and youth, as both contested signifiers and embodied beings, were spotted early as collateral casualties—or even direct targets—in neoliberalism’s then emerging war on the public. And, why wouldn’t they be? They depend(ed), as a function of their limited political and social rights, on various institutions associated with the social state—schools, community organizations, social support systems, etc. It is difficult to attack the institutions on which youth depend, unless youth themselves also get cast as problems integrally related to the “wasteful” public institutions that need to be wasted. Twenty years into the “war on youth,” we “publicly” discuss things like the “school-to-prison pipeline,” “youth as criminals,” and “failing public schools” as we might have discussed publicly, a generation ago, the school-to-college (or –job)-pipeline, “youth as the future,” and “helping public schools succeed.” [Robbins and Lacy 2003: in publication]

The key targets of neoliberal ideology and the role of youth were youth crime, teenage pregnancy, and welfare reform, as well as the dysfunctions and failures of public education. Rarely connected to increasing youth poverty, the neoliberal agenda developed in California through policies and programs supported by the likes of Republican Governor Pete Wilson. In the Oakland Projects we tracked critical commentary on policies affecting, in particular, poor youth of color through our work with organizations but more importantly through the direct experiences of youth. Welfare reform, for example, was addressed in *Expectations*, which brought together different actors to discuss teen pregnancy—a primary target of anti-immigration policy makers—and its relationship to education and poverty. We wanted to

counter what Christopher Robbins describes as the “symbolic and material work” that was progressively (and continually) dismantling the social relationships between adults and youth:

These social things do not operate only as serious, sometimes deadly serious, political issues, but they operated, and continue to operate, in (anti-) public pedagogical terms; it takes considerable symbolic and material work, across a range of sites and relationships, for adults to unhinge youth, along with public institutions and agencies that were once “beyond left and right,” from collective commitments to each other and a democratic future. [Robbins and Lacy 2003: in publication]

The “pedagogy” of youth culture was having a subtler but nonetheless dire impact, as youth-generated cultural forms of resistance were easily massaged into images to invoke fear in a population increasingly racially divided, producing ever more conservative responses. The very attractions of the media for youth—its own form of public pedagogy reframed and directed at them often (but not only) by commercial interests—made its closer analysis an important platform for the Oakland Projects’ broad-based pedagogy. The media, public opinion, and youth policy all became primary targets for our attempt to provide new knowledge through the projects. But first we began with young people.

Class- and Workshop-Based Curricula

Young people in Oakland, with the truths of their lived realities, were the obvious interlocutors, teachers, and partners for this project. Their experience was the fundamental materiality of each project. In school sites we questioned youth on how they were portrayed in the media, which led to our first performance: *Teenage Living Room*. Two high school and two college teachers collaborated on a semester-long classroom curriculum at Oakland Technical High School. The course, built around media literacy, provided students with tools to deconstruct the highly mediated and often unfavorable images of youth in the news. Our rationale for pursuing this subject with high school students rested fundamentally on an equity argument. As we noted:

In a culture segregated by economics and geography, we gain much of our information about others from the media. By definition, the images of a few, shown on the media to represent the many, become stereotypes... Our personal contacts with these different groups are limited: the homeless are better known through a television documentary than through the brief and intermittent contact we have with them in the streets; we learn about battered women from magazine articles not the woman next door; and if we are not ourselves closely associated with inner-city teenagers, then much of what we know comes from media,

recently through reportage of violent crime. [Press materials, Box 8, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001].

Media literacy, as defined by the Trent Think Tank on Media Literacy, a symposium held in Toronto in 1989, was “the ability to decode, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms.” By the early 90s theory and practices from Canada, where media literacy was taught in public schools, had become a topic of concern for progressive educators in the U.S. J. Francis Davis has pointed out that “the definition of media literacy education changed significantly during the 1980s. This change can be described as a movement from media education as discrimination to media education as empowerment.” Media literacy was becoming recognized as part of a defensive strategy against racism and discrimination against youth by Oakland organizations, although the means of addressing media imagery was often through murals on walls of private buildings and schools.²⁶

Young people understood media and valued its self-reflective identity-forming capacities (although they weren’t always able to articulate the deeper implications, for example, of gangsta rap on their relationships with incarceration), and the opportunity to consciously construct images through video and performance was quite appealing. As Leuckessia Spencer Hirsh, one of the student leaders in *The Roof Is On Fire*, said: “I think of media literacy as trying to teach a fish about wetness. It’s everywhere, it shapes your whole way of being. When all those images are negative, when they tell you constantly that you are less idealistic, less intelligent, less motivated, [and] have fewer opportunities than the generations that came before you, you feel bad and frustrated” [Spencer, Roof on Fire video transcript, Box 4, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The success of our first course, based on student course evaluations, faculty reflection, and anecdotal feedback on students’ performance in *Teenage Living Room*, prompted us to evaluate the way curriculum could operate artistically and pedagogically. It provided an angle through which we approached other topics of empowerment and citizenship. It made sense to engage district-wide in the second phase of the project (described earlier, at the start of *Roof*), to encourage teachers to generate their own lessons in media literacy, as it was not often taught in U.S. high schools. As one of our high school faculty partners told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter:

²⁶ Among the Oakland organizations that adopted critical media theory in their youth-centered curricula and after-school programs was the East Bay Institute for Urban Arts. In addition, several politically oriented organizations supported youth’s voice through the spoken word and music, including Youth Speaks and Youth Radio at the local radio station KPFA, two organizations that continue to operate in the Bay Area.

We knew that media was a very influential part of their lives, almost like an absentee parent. They have a very ambiguous relationship to media because their culture is co-opted for commercial purposes, to sell products, which brings them into the mainstream culture, but media also projects an image of teenagers as gangsters. It becomes very complicated, so we thought we would give them some tools to think about media and how it affects who they are. At the end, we did a performance, which was very successful. [Muchnic 1996]

Over the course of the Oakland Projects we designed curricula for high school students, their faculty, pregnant and parenting teens, incarcerated and adjudicated students, and police (among others), exploring, to one degree or another, the intersections between negative imagery on youth and the political perspectives they supported. We partnered with county and city school districts, but also with youth organizations, the health department, probation office, and police department to design curricula that linked youth experiences to public policy. Concrete and repeatable curricula, with syllabi and background readings developed by artists or high school and college faculty, became integrated as a key component in the Oakland Projects, and some of these were adopted by the agencies with whom we worked.

Youth Development Activities

I have discussed the obligation to act politically in the public sphere as a matter of ethical citizenship, and the responsibility as an educator to develop relevant curricula, but working with youth has direct pedagogical responsibilities as well. The dilemma for artists and other youth workers is, as we quickly discovered, the overwhelming lack of support for this work and for the youth themselves. We constantly confronted dilemmas, not unlike the ones Lauren Manduke told me she faced as a high school teacher: If you discovered a student had been thrown out of her home, should you let her spend the night on your couch, in spite of school regulations? Then there was the questions of where to focus our efforts. Should we concentrate on educational activities that were remedial to dismal public education? Or on door-to-door community organizing in neighborhoods where the students lived? Or on public attitudes? Particularly when as our projects seldom had much institutional support, we had to intervene in unexpected ways, from consulting with a teacher to taking pregnant girls to the hospital, from helping fill out college applications to testifying in court. All of this is essential work (and we must add to the list personal counseling and relationship-building).

Youth development arose as the praxis between educational theory and activist organizing. This set of best practices focused on what was needed (overall, and provided for by all) to support young people through developmental stages that resulted in a “successful” adulthood. Karen

Pittman and Michele Cahill (1992) defined youth development as “the ongoing growth process in which all youth are engaged in attempting to (1) meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and (2) to build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.” Unlike a school, educating youth wasn’t our only, or even our core objective, but we understood that vulnerable youth needed sustained and focused support, and we saw it as our ethical responsibility to ensure this.

Along with employing youth development principles and strategies, we used local research to identify assets and indicators of youth wellbeing, in particular the *Call to Action: An Oakland Blueprint for Youth Development* published in 1996 by the Urban Strategies Council. They interviewed youth to develop information and a list of key “indicators” on topics from families and parenting, to school and ambitions for the future, to the lack of safety in youth’s neighborhoods. This research became the groundwork for ongoing policy and program formation, including the Oakland Youth Policy. We adopted their indicators (sense of safety, self-esteem, feelings of belonging, perception of responsibility to others, self-awareness) as both a guide to our planning and as the criteria with which we evaluated our relationship with youth.

In addition to the in-depth work of our organizational partners, our third pedagogical intervention was drawn from feedback from our youth leadership teams, organized for each project. Youth development principles suggested that the fundamental premise of each project should be to support youth and advance their capacities and leadership abilities. Our youth development was in two areas: extensive workshops for each project and our practices throughout the project. We addressed over 1,000 youth in our workshops and brought scores of adults into the conversation as well. Workshop participants and leadership teams acquired skills in art-making (including video and performance), computer-aided graphics, and public advocacy practices (including speaking to media and community groups).

In terms of our own practices, all project artists were asked to develop mentoring relationships, taking the time to initiate young people into the art process at the level their developmental capacity and experience allowed. Focusing on mentor training also became part of the core curriculum for police—our training manual developed for Oakland police officers in 1998 featured a review of current literature on social conditions of youth in the city (demographic factors including economic status, schooling, and parenting), indicators of youth well-being, discussion of criminal justice and youth/race issues from a progressive and youth-centered perspective, and a set of guidelines for being a youth ally. In *Code 33* mentor recruitment was a prominent part of the action for the community. Interestingly, some police officers had a real

interest in mentoring. As police captain Sharon Jones said in *Youth, Cops, and Videotape*, “We need to be role models and friends, not just authority figures.”

It was in the schools that I first began to understand the depth and breadth of social, institutional, and familial failures in the lives of Oakland youth. On a personal level, through these projects I came to see that coaching—mentoring—was the most critical need in areas such as Oakland. I realized early on that the most significant contribution I could make in the individual lives of young people was to personally mentor a few youth, and I’ve formed several relationships that have lasted for years. I am not alone in this. It is characteristic of most youth-workers and artists who explore youth development.

Awareness in grant-making foundations of youth development, particularly as they related to the arts, was given a big boost by Shirley Brice Heath with her 1996 high-profile report based on her multi-year research of learning outcomes in after-school arts programs (see also Heath 1998). She continues to ask such questions as:

What features make any artistic engagement personally, socially, and intellectually important and educationally catalytic? When we invite young people to make products, performances, and works of art, what is it that they are learning as they create? How can educators and arts practitioners create more effective conditions for artistic engagement that activate agency and ownership for young people? [Heath 2013]

Heath’s research has focused in particular on the qualities that artists often innately bring to their relationships with youth as they engage in a process of making, and to salutary aspects of the art-making process itself. She was personally engaged in the later stages of the Oakland Projects, and her work provided helpful guidelines into which aspect of our activities might lead to effective youth development.²⁷ We did depart from this particular study of hers, in some respects, to the degree that our goal included work on public attitudes and the construction of projects in contemporary art.

Producing Publics (Community Organizing)

The preparation phase of each project included organizing, research, collective agenda-setting, and communications design. Pedagogically the work operated on a variety of levels, and one of

²⁷ One of the partnerships we developed was a West Oakland action research project, which I co-authored with Heath and which was presented to the Hewlett Foundation to urge their investment in after-school arts activities in Oakland.

these was “producing community.” It started with an analysis of the existing power relationships, the organizations, activities, and institutions that dramatically impact the ability of youth to thrive, including education, health care, criminal justice, and city government. The analysis also looked at non-profit organizations, churches, neighborhood groups, and families. Each suggested a “public” that could be temporarily produced for the artwork through community organizing. We created literal maps of the local institutional and political “geographies.” Who, we would ask, are the major players in city hall, on school boards, in police departments, on police oversight committees, in respected non-profits, and in public and private high schools and continuation schools? What are their spheres of influence, their theoretical approaches, their strategies that we might adopt, the potential ways we might support them? In this way the entire trajectory of ten years could be seen as a lengthy process of community organizing.²⁸

Taken together, the projects were discursive and layered, framed for the most part around small and increasingly larger conversations. These could be informal, during research or preparation, or staged in a performance or installation. Conversation was the basic research tool for each project: Who was the primary voice in the work? Who needed to hear this conversation? What is needed besides art (e.g. news reports, curriculum, youth development, training in how to deal with street encounters with police, and so on)?

Conversations for purposes of research could become an opportunity to align values and goals and an invitation to partner. At some point during each meeting we asked: “What needs to be done?”—thus creating a shared image of where and how we might impact existing programs, situations, and attitudes. During the research phase, strategies and practices from organizations as diverse as the Police Activity League, CopWatch, and the Mentoring Center were explored.

²⁸ Oakland, as I have mentioned, had a history of radical organizing. In 1966, when an Oakland church invited Saul Alinsky to organize among poor African Americans, the City Council passed a resolution banning him from the city. Published at about the same time as Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Alinsky’s *Rules for Radicals* (1971) became one of the most influential books on modern community organizing—one that described actions and images as much like any performance art I was later to see. I had been introduced to Alinsky’s work in 1968 when I was trained in VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), the so-called “internal peace corps.” Addressing activists of my generation, in *Rules for Radicals* he laid out rules for mass organizing of the “have nots” to take from the “haves.” He described clear and uncomplicated methodologies on how to lead from behind, to develop leadership from within communities, and to strike at seats of power in highly theatrical and attention-getting manners. His legacy lives today in the work of artists and activists, including the early work of Barack Obama in Chicago’s South Side. It is safe to say that many of the activists I worked with during the Oakland Projects were to some degree under the power of Alinsky’s opening statement in *Rules*: “What follows is for those who want to change the world from what it is to what they believe it should be.”

The performance siting, drama, and participation were derived from, or designed to align with, existing agendas, to strengthen the organizations and/or maximize impact. This evolving and field-based analysis was critical to the formation of the “publics” that would operate within the work and upon it, formed, temporarily, through its production.

As a project progressed, collaborators joined our group of artists and volunteers as needs presented themselves. For example, if lighting became important, we sought out a lighting designer, who assumed a level of engagement based on interest, available funds, and ability to enter the discursive frame of the work. In addition to artists, people with shared values came forward to assume paid or unpaid roles, as fund-raisers, organizers, or the like. As an example of this complex community-organizing process, my relationships with two consecutive mayors and two police chiefs and our offices within city hall provided hundreds of opportunities to hold meetings under the umbrella of various city agencies. As an example of this Charles Garoian (1999) reports:

*To satisfy my curiosity, Lacy graciously invited me to be her guest at a luncheon meeting in city hall (an unlikely environment for an artist to work in), where I could observe, firsthand, the way that she works with communities. Lacy, Mayor Elihu Harris, and other high-level public officials ... were seated around a conference table in the mayor’s boardroom. They had gathered to review *The Roof Is on Fire and No Blood, No Foul*, two nationally publicized performances that dealt with youth and violence in the city. More important, the meeting was intended to discuss the possibility of further collaborations with the Oakland community and youth over the next two years.*

What I thought would amount to a “show and tell” event turned out to be a provocative work session in which Lacy discussed and brainstormed with city officials on ways to affect public policy through art.... Mayor Harris maintained that integrating art and culture in every aspect of the policy sends a message to and with young people. “Art is the conduit, the vehicle for communicating youth issues and concerns,” he said. Considering the fact that youth are most often portrayed as “thugs,” Lacy’s projects produced not only positive representations of youth but also the “best press” that the City of Oakland had ever received about working with youth. When it was her turn to speak, Lacy stated:

“I represent art skills. Each of you represents a different set of skills necessary to the success of this project. It is essential that we work together in partnership. I need each of you to brainstorm with me, to provide insights into your various issues, needs, and ideas on solving community problems. Art is a neutral zone where these issues can be dealt with in creative ways. Community-based art focuses not on art objects, but on cultural

processes. Art in the past has been alienated from society. Now artists want in. Students [youth] want to say something, and artists can facilitate their discussions. This is a brainstorming session. Art needs to be connected to policy and service in the community.”

... As the meeting proceeded, Lacy invited all who were in attendance to participate as members of an advisory group, to help continue and shape the project with her and the youth of Oakland. [Garoian 1999:156–57]

It was this lengthy process of finding intersecting agendas and developing resources to produce the work creatively and materially that created “publics” for the project; and these publics were contextualized by a broader notion of publics, which included residents of the region, youth across the country, prison reformers, those who follow the news, who vote, who might even be antagonistic to our aims—those we wanted to “educate.”

Performance and Expanded Publics

The final site for our pedagogies was in the public gaze, where we enacted our performances, installations, and mass media productions. The art production was the culmination of a particular body of research, representing the processes, values, and agendas. Given the ongoing nature of our projects, though, the work never really ended after a production. We were involved in evaluations, budget finalization, thank-you notes, video editing, and follow-up conversations with our youth teams for months, even years, after each project. For example, at the public screening of the documentary of *The Roof Is On Fire*, I entered into conversation with the police chief Joe Samuels, which laid the groundwork for our next performance, *No Blood/No Foul*. This interconnection is why we extended the artistic framing to include process and performance, relationships and results, negotiations and failures. The Oakland Projects would not be interesting as an artwork without the performances, exhibitions, and installations, but these would not be sufficient without the connective tissue described above. Through performances and their media coverage, we engaged with a truly broad audience, often national in scope. It was the most visible piece of our pedagogy, which operated, as Christopher Robbins has suggested, on multiple pedagogical registers:

Youth engaged in conversations about their lives in a reclaimed public space, where community members acted as witnesses to the youth’s individual and collective acts of testifying. You engaged the local news stations in the events and, in this way, the projects took on another public pedagogical dimension when the interest stories that explored the project played across thousands of television sets, momentarily reclaiming both material

and visual space while illuminating the public and a set of some of its most pressing problems. These projects provided a richly layered form of public pedagogy: They drew upon and connected a variety of groups and institutions (e.g., the police, the media, the schools, the “community,” and youth), while reconstructing public spaces around a set of issues that had at its center the public interest, the reclaiming of a public space in the public interest. [Robbins and Lacy 2013: in publication]

The pedagogical work of the performances and installations was meant to engage youth in an understanding of their collective position in society and to engage an audience as witnesses and actors. Having constituted its publics through engaging a variety of collaborators, the performance brings them together on a platform that allows the audience to supply their own multiple meanings. The aesthetic task for the artist in all of this is to “find the shape,” the act or acts of imagination that are formed and inform the processes set out above.

Aesthetics

The performances in the Oakland Projects have to be looked at through a variety of lenses to evaluate their effectiveness, drawing not only from the political and pedagogic, but also from theater, performance art, conceptual art, happenings, and so on. My focus here is on how developing form (what takes place during the performance and by whom) arises from an interaction with given material (voice, a rooftop site, lighting, etc.) and with political necessities (protecting performers, supporting authentic conversation, etc.).

To begin with, based on conceptual art, I want to suggest that if a meeting can be a performance (as Boal says), and running for mayor of a small town can be an artwork (as Kaprow suggests in “The Real Experiment” [1983]), then the Oakland Projects operate within this same art/life legacy. As I have written elsewhere:

Although [Code 33] was not influenced by Boal’s [work], and my own mentorship by Kaprow at Cal Arts places me squarely in his visual arts lineage, Code 33’s deep structures bear an uncanny resemblance to Boal’s Legislative Theatre. Speaking of Legislative Theatre, Boal suggests: “It should be understood that rehearsals are already a cultural political meeting in themselves...every exercise, every game, every technique is both art and politics” [1998: 48]. This and other aesthetic ideas are shared [in different ways] by Kaprow and Boal, particularly those having to do with expanding boundaries of art.... While Kaprow clearly gives permission to include all subject matter as relevant [and is

deeply concerned with ethics], it is in Boal's work that we find evidence of a highly refined aesthetic of social justice in operation. [Lacy 2006: 278]

The question is, how do we frame this current investigation within art? With this premise in mind—that a cultural political meeting can be theater—we can interrogate the site (or stage), duration, and actors/action for their theatrical dimensions. The site selected for two of the performances (*The Roof Is On Fire* and *Code 33*) was a garage roof in the center of the city. As discussed earlier, the roof represented a “center,” an intersecting point between different Oakland residential neighborhoods, unmarked and unclaimed by youth—a sort of neutral zone. On the other hand it was charged as a site of power—where businesspeople owned the daytime and police controlled the streets at night—a site marked with the authority of the adult world. That the roof, with its heightened elevation, carried a sense of remove from the streets was also a factor in our choice. The significance of this site as a stage went beyond geography and metaphor. Its significance was provided by the rapt gaze of the audience with their conflicting experiences of the city and attitudes toward its youth. As Boal writes:

The aesthetic space is the creation of the audience: it requires nothing more than their attentive gaze in a single direction for this space to become 'aesthetic', powerful, 'hot', five-dimensional ... the objects no longer carry out their usual daily signification, but become the stuff of memory and imagination.... Every tiny gesture is magnified, and the distant becomes closer. [Boal 1998: 71–72]

Who the audience is and what experiences they bring to the event—whether activists protesting police abuse, families of police, teachers, children, the elderly, African Americans, Latinos, whites, Southeast Asians, politicians, students, or businesspeople—provides aesthetic texture and political significance to their gaze. The audiences for most of our performances were mixed, truly representing the city, including all ages and ethnicities and occupations. In *Code 33* “it was the collective gaze of the audience that lifted the normally privatized discourse to civic relevance—a multi-vocal and simultaneous civic discourse spotlighting the relationship between youth and police before the media and the community” (Lacy 2006: 280).

The underlying assumption was that relationship has not only a personal and political meaning, but that its enactment in public can be aesthetic, even visual, encompassing the rhythms, sound, verbal exchanges, gestures, and meanings that mark a performance. The performance was the tip of the iceberg, representing all the small exchanges, negotiations, and conflicts that went into the production. To enact the discourse within public sphere, I considered what would promote a better understanding and more empathy for youth. As an artist, this is to construct moments,

large and small, of teaching/learning; it's an aesthetic crafting within the territory of relationships, one whose success or failure as art rests on a mostly invisible staging of authentic and revelatory conversation among "actors" and "audience" at every stage. As Garoian observes: "Lacy's intention is to use public art as a liminal space where citizens can only critique, discuss, and debate those issues and concerns that are specific to their communities and to work collectively in fulfilling their desires" (Garoian 1999: 14).

There are two key theatrical actions here—the way in which listening is enacted by the audience, and the way voice is expressed by the youth. But both are actors and none are excluded. In *Code 33* the audience faced a loose set of rules and freedoms: they could move freely throughout the space, enter and exit the performance when they chose, select from a variety of conversations or videos, talk with each other, or just stare out at the darkening city. The narrative structure was loose, life-like, shaped by the agency of individual viewers. There was time to take in information, reflect, and converse. However, they could not, although many tried, intervene in conversations, which were protected by a theatrical fourth wall enforced by our monitors.²⁹ The audience's freedoms mimicked civic life and created an environment of conviviality, but one marked always by the presence of an examination of a serious theme. A very real power difference was always present, ready to erupt at any sign of disturbance.

As with Boal's Legislative Theater, the drama of *Code 33* relied upon real people assuming the roles they played in life, with legitimate stakes in the event. At times the performers traversed expected roles, with police expressing vulnerability and youth offering advice to officers. In the second act community members took the stage, trading roles with the police and youth, to reflect on the impact of youth-police conflict. Boal has discussed the importance of such transitive roles:

The frontier between the actor and the spectator is no longer impassable because there is an exchange of duties.... It is the stable division of functions which has been transformed, as neither the actor nor the spectator plays the same role throughout the event ... the double role of all theatrical work has been preserved as the action always takes place under the control of a critical gaze. [Banu 1981: 6]

²⁹ When a critic recently asked me, in relation to *Silver Action* (2013) at the Tate why viewers were placed in a listening rather than speaking position, I replied that "for me the audience is a participant, as I don't make separations in kind but in degree of engagement.... The audience as a part of the performance was responding in various participatory ways—talking to each other, some talking to me and other monitors, and so on. There were reasons for the separation of 'audience' from performer in this work, mostly around 'framing,' but also about eliciting 'desire,' in the audience—provoking a desire to engage, to better understand, a desire at once personal, aesthetic and political."

Throughout the Oakland Projects, the youth were protagonists, the primary “actors,” in both the politically activated as well as the theatrical senses of the word. The youth voice was the root aesthetic material meant to challenge stereotypes. Listening was both a political choice and an aesthetic one, describing the role of the audience, who represented the community and perhaps society at large, as a learner, and the young people as teachers with the knowledge needed for full civic discourse. Young people needed to be heard, not just seen in the streets, and this applied to not only to one-on-one relationships but also “in public.” As Lauren Manduke concluded from *Teenage Living Room*: “To teach teens that they have a choice, that they could decide for themselves instead of having the media decide for them was perhaps the most profound lesson of all” (Notes, Box 2, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001).

The primacy of “voice” was not only a performative device but also a developmental one for the youth. Training in personal expression, political intervention strategies, and other strategies of enacting “empowerment” was necessary as “rehearsal” for the performance. As Nick Couldry (2010) suggests, voice matters as a “value to us as both humans and social actors/citizens.” Here he is referring “to the act of valuing, and choosing to value, those frameworks for organizing human life and resources that themselves value voice... Treating voice as a value means discriminating against frameworks of social economic and political organization that deny or undermine voice.” Over time youth participants evolved as communicators. In a sense, the performance was the expression of the youth development that had taken place individually and collectively. With the performance we provided a stage on which to examine authentic, multiple, and (mostly) unmediated voices. Its importance to the political sphere was immeasurable. Through their individual voices we hoped to reframe a political context for youth experience, and thus each performance marked a point along a path to, as Christopher Robbins has put it, “re-hinge” youth with our social and political aspirations as a society (Robbins and Lacy 2013: in publication).

In discussions with me during the development of *The Roof Is On Fire*, Troy Duster was looking at popular culture in the diversity of Bay Area youth, with their different cultural experiences—in the food they eat, their music, their ways of thinking and being. They meet in the classroom, what he called “the core enterprise,” and if the schools were more integrated, they would provide a fluid place to reframe identities and learn to move across boundaries. The Oakland public schools, however, were almost exclusively places for people of color, and private schools almost exclusively white. But the public sphere of our very exposed rooftop offered a place for affirmation, where the conflict of difference versus isolation could be

reframed in a positive way. As Duster indicated, our performances could create such a space, where youth could explore who they were, not what they were not.

Ethics

Ethical questions are important in shaping my work and I have written about them frequently. Questions about rights and representation, particularly across race and class, are always present. Can a photographer use a photo of you without your agreement? Can a playwright use an incident from your life to create a character? There aren't uniform answers—if no representation was allowed, much of the cultural arts as we know them wouldn't exist—but the issues are particularly poignant for people who suffer from their “casting” in the public realm, where public representation can affect the quality of their lives. In Oakland, how youth were represented, and by whom, was the crux of the matter, politically speaking. Was it reasonable to expect that adults could support a more nuanced and sophisticated representation of youth by youth themselves? What slippages might occur when adults had an artistic interest in the outcome?

In the Oakland Projects, the great diversity in terms of ethnicity, age, perceived class membership, relationship to power, and politics made for often-rocky processes. Within every category we touched upon there were intense politics: between teachers and school administrators or administrators and school boards, between students of different ethnicities or from different neighborhoods, between adults and youth, and so on. Our position as artists, our public statements, and our production processes became an operative aspect of the art, wherein we continually analyzed the complexities and imperfections in our personal behavior and in the work itself. As with critical pedagogy, reflexive self-analysis is fundamental, along with creating a transparent and public process of production. Environmental artists Tim Collins and Reiko Goto comment: “If we believe in a plurality of moral and political beliefs, we will have to rely on a constant self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and a frequent sharpening up of our moral awareness.” (Lacy notes taken during Working in Public seminar 2: www.workinginpublicseminars.org)

One impediment to the “sharpening up of our moral awareness” has to do with art-making itself. While cultivating and preserving “voice,” representing relationships between people and groups, and dealing with preconceptions and prejudices are important to my aesthetic, so are lighting and stage design. Collaboration is a misunderstood term in social art practices; our projects were *collaborative*, evidencing degrees of participation in invention and decision-making, and a willingness to consistently revisit and critique both images and processes. I

would say the process was consensual—open rather than closed—a complex form of engagement based on participant rights and responsibilities. Who, for example, is contributing time and energy as opposed to just dropping by, and therefore might deserve a stronger vote? Who needs control over the experiential content? (We always prioritized the speakers themselves.) What spheres of collaboration are possible and desirable given different levels of skills? These were open to discussion and revision, but I was the one who signed off on matters of aesthetics.

The issue of aesthetic control is vexing. Working initial images out in the public setting of stakeholders' meetings is complex, and strict collaboration, at the scale I work on, does not produce powerful art, which entails a series of framings and skills. Yet cultural biases are inherent in the way we think and invent images. Negotiating with youth on the imagery for the Oakland Projects was imperative, but the process was negotiative, not youth-led. The transparency of this process was politically essential, and a willingness to negotiate even, or especially, the images within a work provided the project's discursive texture—one aspect of the relational "fabric" or web between performances. As I stated in a document in our project files:

Getting it "Right" can also be a measure of the quality of the process. In large scale art works, dealing with a lot of people ... there are controversies that arise during the planning process. Artists generally seek control, even if it is over chaos. Or they might adopt a stance of non-control, but that is only a stance, because in that case it is the concept of contingency at work.... It's pretty natural: we make things, and that involves a form of craft or, vernacularly, control. [Notes, Box 12, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The artist's role changes when work moves from the studio to the street, and anticipations of possible outcomes derived from the work also change. Kaprow (1994) suggested that at most the artist in public engagement is a "model-maker," so skeptical was he of claims for broad social transformation by early practitioners. That skepticism as to whether change can indeed result from visual art, and if so where this change would be sited, is interesting but ultimately not an ethical issue, unless one believes that art in public *must* result in a measurable transformation. What *is* at issue is how the artist is positioned (his/her symbolic relevance) within the work, the arts profession, and what I call "the field of the work"—the public sphere it addresses. Hal Foster (1996) made the case for the ethical problems inherent in the quasi-anthropological positioning of social practice as it makes its way up the art hierarchy and becomes gradually more acceptable to the art world (a more salient critique today than when he wrote it):

Consider this scenario ... an artist is contacted by a curator about a site-specific work. He or she is flown into town in order to engage the community targeted for collaboration by the institution. However, there is little time or money for much interaction with the community (which tends to be constructed as readymade for representation). Nevertheless a project is designed, and an installation in the museum and/or an artwork in the community follows. Few of the principles of the ethnographic participant–observer are observed, let alone critiqued. And despite the best intentions of the artist, only limited engagement of the sited other is effected. Almost naturally the focus wanders from collaborative investigation to “ethnographic self-fashioning,” in which the artist is not decentered so much as the other is fashioned in artistic guise. [Foster 1996:303]

The Oakland Projects, as self-generated and deeply embedded in the community, might be situated outside Foster’s criticism here (the art world wasn’t particularly interested in this work at that time), but the cautionary note is still appropriate. Forming partner or sponsor relationships to negotiate between agendas and mobilize multiple resources brings in the possibility of co-option, particularly by institutions like City Hall. Our partnership model was to bring a collection of civic institutions and local non-profits together and to bridge differences by focusing on what we had in common: a deep concern for youth development. Yet each new partnership was of concern, potentially, to other partners. People were careful about their alignment in the various coalitions that ran across the city’s political history, although coalition was very central to organizing in the 90s. Our attempt to “reach across” a spectrum of political opinion and tactics was both a strength and, in some quarters, a perceived weakness. Of all of our partnerships, the one with the Oakland Police Department was the most controversial.

It was our initiative to seek a partnership with the police after our youth leadership team requested a discourse between youth and police after *The Roof Is On Fire*. Our first approach was to the Police Activities League in Sobrante Park, to provide a video workshop. Next, on the recommendation of youth-advocate officers, we worked with the Police Training Department to create a “training “video. Progressively we worked our way into a consultative relationship with the chief and supported him in developing a youth advisory team. Interestingly, youth were often eager in principle to have an honest conversation with police officers (even though most had had disturbing prior experiences, even traumatic ones, with police); they seemed to want an opportunity to symbolically “speak back to power” (a theme in youth culture). Over time we found that the ability to converse in workshops led by conflict resolution trainers did for several youth translate into a different relationship in the street with specific officers. But the major impact was on the police culture itself, which struggled with ways to negotiate officer

perspectives on youth. How could officers make a decision on when and where it was safe to override their typical self-protective and authorial stance with a more humane, listening centered approach?

Navigating this relationship was complex. *Code 33* in particular consistently aroused suspicions from street police as well as from community members who felt that all communication with the police was politically pointless and, in fact, counter-revolutionary. There is no clear response to the criticism that working with the police, rather than protesting them, is wrong. It is partially a matter of tactics. Certainly I can recount multiple anecdotes showing the effectiveness of our workshops between youth and police. More to the point, this critique is to be expected in large-scale work that engages multiple actors in a contested conversation. Each participant must be brought to the table by force or by persuasion and the promise of enough safety to speak freely. We, of course, were working as persuaders: our ability to get 250 performers on the rooftop for each of these performances was based for the most part on people's (particularly the youth's) desire to participate.

This is imperfect art, and imperfect public conversation, that can, at best, commit to a level of transparency that allows ongoing questioning of the processes and images. The outcomes are unpredictable and move forward according to the good will of many. In our project files I wrote:

In projects that attract people based on their subject matter, around which there are strong opinions, there are times when the image (or content or intentions) is challenged. Everyone sees it differently; everyone completes the picture according to our own vision. For the most part that doesn't make for problems as differences between the way I see something and the way someone I work with sees it are small or inconsequential enough; we have, after all, made the decision to work together because of shared values.... When challenges to images come forward, which they repeatedly do when you work with large numbers of people, then it is important to assess the source of the challenge, whether it comes from a difference in political perspective, aesthetics, or personal preferences, whether it is about asserting control or verbalizing existing and suppressed opinions, and so on.... Does the image need revision, politically speaking? If so, will it still be powerful as art?

Many challenges have caused us to change the work ... how it looks, how it is played out, who performs, and so on. Working on an image for one or two years with scores of people and hundreds of performers, is a lesson in life. You bring what you can to the table, others respond, some critique, you learn, you change, you are challenged. Challenges to the process and image are absorbed, discarded, adopted, or left by agreement unresolved

and we move forward. If the disagreements were too great I'd be producing a performance with no participants. [Notes, Box 12, Archive, in Lacy 1991-2001]

The ongoing processes and critiques, within and outside of the projects, identified edges where the ethical debate arose, and as a result of this we adopted specific practices (some of which have been mentioned, but bear repeating here):

1. All projects had to provide a variety of youth development activities. This was particularly stressed by the young people we worked with, who insisted that each project provide skills and concept development through broadly available workshops. We provided approximately 1,000 youth with after-school and in-school projects, workshops within youth conferences, and stand-alone art and video production projects. We recommended that all adults in the project also mentor one of our youth leaders, and young people were integrated into all aspects of the project process. Many youth moved to consecutive projects in higher leadership positions.
2. All projects were based on social and political analyses co-developed by youth and adults (from research), widely communicated to project participants and open to evaluation through a discursive process that informed all meetings.
3. All projects were to be socially inclusive, open to all groups and individuals based on their interest in contributing. Youth on leadership teams came from different schools and were paid stipends for their participation and also provided activities, food, and skills training. One project led to another through conversations with youth from the preceding project.
4. Everyone had personal control over the content and expression of personal experience. Leadership youth were trained in speaking to the press and practiced this during preparation and production of all performances. Public conversations in performances were “sculpted” by participant team leaders, who created a collective set of questions from which small groups selected their topics of conversation. No attempt was made to interfere with spontaneous deviations from selected topics, and participants were aware that the questions provided a performative operating framework to keep issues relevant and moving along.
5. All projects had to protect youth emotional and physical safety as the top priority. On an individual level, this meant workshop leaders had to take youth home after evening

events, for example, and young people were fed often—not a small issue in the midst of hidden poverty. On structural levels, we tried to create connections between youth and caring adults. In preparing for *The Roof Is On Fire*, for example, our participating teachers organized student leaders at their school sites, who in turn brought in other participants. Youth from the high schools thus had identified teachers they could turn to if emotional or safety issues came up during or after the production. Students defined their own topics of conversation and were coached to only speak within their own parameters and sense of security.

6. We considered the issue of youth safety from police reprisal over the course of several years, seeking input from youth, officers, and community organizers with deep experience in youth-police conflicts. Our officer and youth leaders who had been through a five-week workshop with each other created “rehearsal” sessions before the *Code 33* performance for participants to meet each other and decide on their conversational agenda. Each conversation group had a conflict resolution professional who moderated to ensure youth were able to speak.
7. We attempted to develop sustainable models and practices that would support those organizations with whom we partnered in better addressing youth needs. We supported numerous temporary interventions, such as the Chief’s Youth Advisory Group and the recommendations to the school superintendent from faculty and students at Fremont High School, as well as a few more permanent ones like the Oakland Youth Policy. Offshoots of this work and its participants are evident today in the Center for Art and Public Life at California College of the Arts and in the arts programs at Alameda County Office of Education. But in general the ability of an institution to absorb and maintain permanent programs (and we designed several) is dependent on the continuing participation of the instigator. (I have written elsewhere [Lacy 1994a] about the difficulties of embedding experimental art programs in institutional settings.) Nonetheless, the critical thinking on points of change during an art project or programs like Kaprow and Kohl’s Project Other Ways, whether or not the project is maintained, contributes to both the aesthetic and the political fields.

Another ethical issue was our choice of performance aesthetics based on accessibility to a broad audience. Communication forms are a choice. We committed to imagery and theatrical processes that were direct, simple, and relatively free of scripting. Audiences had a great deal of choice in their participation. Our performances could be read on a variety of levels, including perspectives from everyday life, from politics, and from ethics or artistry. Finally, as Robbins

articulates, they can be held up as “a model of one type of *public* pedagogy—of a pedagogy that operates in a variety of spaces in the public interest.” He explains:

This work ... continues to speak to the challenge of “find[ing] ways of ensuring free and responsible comment and criticism, and of distributing the actual range of work”—in this case, pedagogical work in which youth themselves played central roles in its production and circulation. Of great significance during our time of public attrition, Lacy’s careful attention to “the public” and its various problems underscored and continues to highlight the critical roles that materiality plays in people’s relationships to the public and in the construction of material public spaces in which people—especially youth—can come together to do the difficult and ethical, often transformative, and always pedagogical work of citizens: deciding, deliberating, debating, choosing, contesting, imagining alternatives in which people can live more responsibly, more justly, more humanely. [Robbins and Lacy 2013: in publication]

Success or Failure When Art Changes

For my *City Sites* (1989), Allan Kaprow revisited his work from Project Other Ways, returning to a school setting in a local Oakland grade school and asking children there to play a game with him, outlining their bodies and groupings of bodies (including, to their delight, Kaprow’s body) on the sidewalks in front of the school. On my urging, he wrote about Project Other Ways for the first time.

Today twenty-five years later, the story is about to be printed in an art book. The art frame will descend upon it. Does it become art at last? And if so, is it good art? A complicating factor is that in my own thoughts and writings about Happenings and their progeny in the sixties, I placed a strong emphasis on identity ambiguity: the artwork was to remain, as long as possible unclear in its status. By this standard, the experiment at Project Other Ways was good art (up to now, to me at least), as long as I kept the story mere hearsay among friends. [Kaprow 1994: 155]

By his own standards, ambiguity of identity was a factor in the success of an artwork, but locating this question within a different setting might reveal other meanings. Locating ambiguity not only as a function of the relationship between art and life, but between forms of human endeavor, is slightly different when posed outside the art world that Kaprow was always, at least in his rhetoric, trying to leave. In the art world his criterion of ambiguity of purpose has been applied to argue against public and social practices that seek conclusions, rather than

ambiguity, with these critics suggesting that “use-value” (art that intends a social outcome of some kind) is antithetical to real art. What if, instead, we relocate ambiguity as an uncertainty of outcome, of the proceeds of discourse, and an exploration of the imperfectability of the work?

Can the Oakland Projects be seen as ambiguous if considered as a worthwhile experiment but one posed against the certainty of conventions in education, public relations, government, and so on? Did the unique creativities and positionings inherent in these projects over many years suggest a new form of art, one that operates as a question in the ambiguous territory between art and the social? Certainly my intentions, like Kaprow’s, were to confound and challenge the unacceptable in current art.

The question is: to whom are we posing the question of ambiguity of identity? The Oakland Projects can, like other social practice art, be critiqued from every direction: as art, they are seen as too narrowly focused on issues of outcome; they are awkward and rarely match well-theorized interaction “models” of the social. On the civic side of things, social practice artworks rarely cause permanent and ongoing change, unless they morph into a non-profit or institutional program. So from the public (non-art) side of culture, they fail in a mission to provoke substantial change.

They do leave their traces, as Arlene Raven (1994) suggests:

The public art ... which attempts to draw together a community and to participate with its audience in the definition and expression of the whole physical and social body in both its unity and diversity... [is] temporary, leaving traces in the hearts and minds of all those affected by the process rather than merely leaving monuments in their midst. [Raven 1994: 162]

But social change is harder to come by than public monuments. I mention these critiques to make a point: art meant to act on social injustices must operate simultaneously on personal, political, and aesthetic levels. To serve personal needs without a political or root cause analysis is to offer a creative “social service,” even to possibly patronize. To expose a political analysis of oppression without responding to immediate personal needs of participants is an academic exercise at best, and at worse irresponsible. To unite attention to the immediate needs of individuals with a public exposure of the social inequities of a group of people within a single work of public art, is important to the resonance and depth of the work on both political and artistic levels. But to truly satisfy its aesthetics, such work must find its “position” within the ongoing conceptual exploration of the borders of art, not unlike those that Kaprow challenged in

the conversation he was so eloquent in representing, finding an uneasy ambiguity of identity that sits astride both life and art.

And of what use is art? Over the years Kaprow and I had many conversations, some of them recorded, in which we discussed the differences between leaving or arriving in art. One frequent subject was whether, as thoroughly ensconced as he was in the arts, he could ever truly leave. As a man recognized in the field, I argued, it was easier to throw it away (metaphorically at least) than it was for me to join the discourse as a working-class feminist advocate of a (then) disparaged art form.

I was (and am still) drawn to Kaprow's subtle and sophisticated advocacy for an investigative and evolving philosophy of art in life, and a commitment to individual experience as a fundamental of democratic pedagogy. I saw in his creation of (and later reflection upon) Project Other Ways an early model, imperfect at best, for social practices. Not in the simple and overt aspects of another art-in-schools project with a disenfranchised community of children, but in the nuanced questioning of the work's identity as art or as education, the fraught collaboration with Kohl, the tension of difference as he engaged with a contested debate in a specific and located community, and his skepticism that any change, even on a personal level, could ultimately result from the work. These all point to the imperfections of works like the Oakland Projects, those that in the end are like public life, and make art interesting (see my writings in Lacy 2010 for more of my thinking on these imperfections).

To summarize, here are some of the unresolved issues from the Oakland Projects, questions that I continue to explore with each new work:

- The difficulty of representation given differences in identity and experience between makers and those represented, and in such situations the difficulty in finding forms of consensus and collaboration that maintain aesthetic integrity
- The complication of a community address that features an emphasis on measurable outcomes, paired with an artistic address that suspects outcomes and anyway has little capacity to measure them
- The problems that a demand for use-value provides for creative experimentation and “ambiguity”
- The drive to create that is often so monolithic in artist vision that it obscures forms of critique and self-critique and gives way to a rationalization as opposed to serious consideration of the problems in the work

- The scale and duration of effort needed for even a small community to work through its own experiences toward a localized and specific change
- The slowness of chances of embedding change models within the larger culture, given the Teflon-nature of public institutions, where even the most arduous efforts over ten years slip away if not developed into programs or policies
- The languages of theory from different disciplines (art, sociology, education, politics, and so on) that, when applied to the realities of disparate communities and different ways of understanding, trouble our ability to grapple with meaning provided by experimentation

Kaprow faced down some of these issues in Project Other Ways, but I am not sure whether he ever gave the project enough serious consideration outside of his brief later involvement in writing his 1994 article on it. Time had passed and his work centered on other questions about the nature of art. I suspect the project was, in the end, too messy for him, too sprawling, too intertwined with a form of closed and opinionated political discourse that was not appealing to him. It was too close to good education and bad art (as it was recognized at the time in the mid-90s), although he was learning to suspend these judgments. In retrospect, however, what makes Project Other Ways interesting *is* his questions. The relationship between the real life of education and the contemplative arena of art was of interest to him practically and metaphorically and remained so throughout his life.

Project Other Ways was intent on merging the arts with things not considered art, namely training in reading, writing, math and so on. Significantly, the innovative art movements of the day provided the models for our objectives. ... Happenings ... found actions, concept art [and the like] confronted publics and arts professionals with strange occurrences bearing little resemblance to the known arts. The identity problem these movements caused in arts circles ... was nothing compared with the potential confusion we could sense lying a short distance away in the education community. [Kaprow 1994: 154-155]

It was a confusion that he could not confront in a complex way, given his amount of time in Oakland, his personal life transitions at that time, and his interests. Kaprow continued his inquiries on the questions of art/life in more intimate and controlled circumstances, what became the “classrooms” of his performances during the 70s and beyond. What other critiques, besides ambiguity, did Kaprow place on this work? He suggested, with his typical ironic and self-effacing manner:

Without some controls and measures, some ways of replicating the activity, what happened between us and a dozen kids in Berkeley can hardly be considered a textbook classic.... [The question] "What happened to the kids after they left us?" probably must be answered "They returned to the way they were." And so, if sustained instruction and growth are necessary for lasting value, as I believe they are, the whole thing was an educational diversion. At best they were entertained. Superficially, that's what art can do. [Kaprow 1994: 156]

In other words, it was not successful as an educational experiment or possibly even as education. That is, the project did not deliver sustained value, or at least Kaprow could not label it as doing so with any confidence.

I can't believe that any positive experience, including that in Project Other Ways, doesn't have some experiential impact on at least some of the people involved. Over the past years multiple youth have contacted me and remember the Oakland Projects as having significance to their present life and work. This is not to overstate the impact in some utopian manner but to remember that, as Kaprow suggested, change operates first in ourselves, in intimate experiences and observations from the minutiae of daily life. In spite of his apparent cynicism (which was more about his process of inquiry), Kaprow concludes with an optimistic question: "Can experimental art and experimental education get together more substantively for the common good? Perhaps, like most new art, such investigations may be and should be only on a laboratory or model-making level." (ibid)

The aesthetic questions I posed at the beginning and throughout the Oakland Projects and am left with today revolve around similar issues. Because of their duration, scale, and complicated reach, these projects did indeed have some effects on both people's lives and in the community, and we did make some attempt to measure them. But this is not necessary or sufficient to explain the real purpose of the work: to explore the relationship between personal experience, community, and experimental art. If it is just "good politics" we are after, creativity brings much to the table, but in the end it is voting, along with policy, laws, and programs that matter most. With its limited resources, art can only go so far, but it can model change and provide laboratories for new formations and coalitions. As Troy Duster suggested in speaking to me about *The Roof Is On Fire*:

You only know what you are doing or who you are in relief against what the others are doing or who they are. What is at stake with Roof Is On Fire is to interrupt the old choreography, to force us to move out of figure-ground, habitual ways of thinking, by

loosening the territory and allowing youth to rethink the issues they took for granted: what it is to be White, Black, Asian, or Latino. It moved across different high schools and different identities, demonstrating how to cross borders. This is what youth need to live in this world. [Personal conversation, Box 4, Lacy 1991-2001]

How do we know when we have succeeded in our public model, or if we have failed?

According to Kaprow:

The means by which we measure success and failure in such fleeting art must obviously shift from the aesthetics of the self-contained painting or sculpture, regardless of its symbolic reference to the world outside of it, to the ethics and practicality of those social domains it crosses into. And that ethics, representing a diversity of special interests as well as the deep ones of a culture, cannot easily be disentangled from the nature of the artwork. Success and failure become provisional judgments, instantly subject (like the weather) to change. [Kaprow 1994: 157]

The success of the Oakland Projects as art, albeit imperfect art, is measured by the ideas the work presents and the ground of questioning it establishes within, in this case, the art/life parameters set up by its own conventions and histories. Success in life is a different matter, and one much more difficult to assess. Maybe it is not the right question.

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Appendix 1: Timeline for the Oakland Projects, 1991–2001

<i>Projects</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Year Sequence</i>	
<i>Teenage Living Room</i>	Spring 1991	Planning for class at Oakland Tech High School by Suzanne Lacy and Chris Johnson	Year 1	
	Summer 1991	Continued planning for class		
	Fall 1991	Sept.–Dec.: Class at Oakland Tech High School with teachers Andy Hamner and Lauren Manduke		
	Winter/Spring 1992	Jan.–May: Second semester class taught by Hamner May 20: <i>Teen Age Living Room</i> performance	Year 2	
<i>The Roof Is On Fire</i>	Summer 1992	Annice Jacoby joins	Year 3	
	Fall 1992	Form TEAM to raise funds		
	Spring 1993	Oakland Sharing Vision sponsor Oakland Unified School District partnership		
	Summer 1993	Continued planning for project	Year 4	
	Fall 1993	Media Literacy course for schoolteachers		
	Spring 1994	Performance production with student leaders		
	Summer 1994	June 4: Rehearsal for <i>The Roof Is On Fire</i> June 5: Festival of the Lake riots Unique Holland, Jacques Bronson, and Michael Manwaring join June 9: <i>The Roof Is On Fire</i> performance <i>Signs of Violence</i> project with California Transit Designer Leslie Becker joins		
		Fall 1994		Plan “Theater of Respect” as Bay Area wide project Receive major Surdna grant Dec.: <i>Signs of Violence</i> installation at Snug Harbor Museum Dec. 15: Screening of <i>The Roof Is On Fire</i> at Oakland Museum
				Spring 1995
	<i>No Blood/No Foul</i>	Summer 1995		June 2–4: Festival Lake/youth and police discussions July: Planning for Oakland Youth Policy begins, with Steve Costa, Sheila Jordan, and Greg Hodges
Winter 1996		Feb. Youth forums lead to City Council resolution		
Summer 1996		June: <i>No Blood/No Foul</i> performance Aug.: <i>No Blood/No Foul</i> installation for Atopic Site, Tokyo	Year 6	
<i>Expectations</i>	Fall 1996	Planning for <i>Expectations</i> with Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE) Lisa Findley and Maxine Wyman join	Year 7	
	Spring 1997	March 3: Mayor’s meeting for Oakland officials April 10: <i>No Blood/No Foul</i> screening at Oakland Museum		
	Summer 1997	June 30–Aug. 8: <i>Expectations</i> course		
	Fall 1997	Capp Street installation and symposium	Year 8	
	Winter 1998	Jan.: Design and mailing of <i>Expectations</i> poster to politicians AIDS project with East Bay Leadership Foundation and Oakland Tech High School		

<i>Code 33</i>	Spring 1998	Begin planning for <i>Code 33</i> May 20: Citywide youth arts workshop June 19: PAL Sobrante workshop	Year 9
	Summer 1998	Aug.: Youth Planning Team workshop	
	Fall 1998	Set up office in City Hall	
	Spring 1999	Youth and police workshop series	
	Fall 1999	Oct. 7: <i>Code 33</i> performance Dec. 8: SEPTED (national city planners) workshop	
<i>Eye 2 Eye</i>	Spring 2000	Performance at Fremont High School	Year 10 and beyond
	Summer 2000	Edit film from Youth Documentary Team	
<i>Research and Follow- up</i>	Fall 2000	East Bay AIDS Foundation: class-based AIDS awareness	
	Spring 2001	West Oakland Youth Development Project begins	
	Fall 2002	Oct. 30: Screening of <i>Code 33</i> in City Council	

Note: Projects distinguished by color. Performances and exhibitions highlighted in yellow.

Appendix 2: The Oakland Projects Archives, 1991–2001. In the collection of Suzanne Lacy, Los Angeles.

The material referenced in this thesis as coming from The Oakland Projects Archives currently exists in a series of boxes organized around project and/or type of media. These boxes include letters, working documents, fax and email communications printed out, examples of printed graphics and diagrams, news clippings and magazine articles, invoices and financial records, grant proposals and evaluations (examples are given in Appendix 3, the CD Rom).

Most of the projects included videos that have been produced and are available in various places for distribution. However, when direct quotes from videotapes are used in this thesis they are drawn from partial transcripts that currently exist in the noted Archive box.

The box numbers in this archive and the contents within them are currently under re-organization.

Box 1. Oakland Youth and Geographic Context

Box 2. Oakland Youth and Context in Teenage Living Room, Roof on Fire, and Expectations performances/installations.

Box 3. Roof on Fire performance, Part 1

Box 4. Roof on Fire performance, Part 2

Box 5. Teens+Educators+Art+Media formation and No Blood No Foul performance, Part 1

Box 6. No Blood No Foul performance, Part 2

Box 7. Expectations performance

Box 8. Press and Media, The Oakland Projects

Box 9. Graphics and Posters, The Oakland Projects

Box 10. T-shirts and Graphics, The Oakland Projects

Box 11. Code 33 performance, Part 1

Box 12. Code 33 performance, Part 2

Box 13. Eye to Eye performance and afterward