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# Methodologies of the Creatively Maladjusted

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Washington University in St. Louis  
Graduate School of Art

# **Methodologies of the Creatively Maladjusted**

By

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A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts of  
Washington University in St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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## **Abstract**

As intellectuals, artists must actively challenge societal power structures and the accepted way of thinking. Unless authority is questioned and discussed by the masses, the perception of power can segue almost seamlessly into actual power. It is the responsibility of the artist to disrupt these ingrained social systems through the work they create. According to Pablo Helguera, there are two different kinds of socially engaged artwork: the symbolic and the actual. While symbolic artwork focuses more on poetics and connecting with the audience, actual artwork emphasizes the functionality and applicable nature of the art. It is vitally important to blend these two forms of artistic practice. The symbolic form engages the public and evokes a response, while the actual form directs that response towards the physical fulfillment of social needs. There are a number of strategies and methodologies that I engage to address these social travails: context, dissemination, art as a media device, collaboration and the unsanctioned. When creating my own artwork, I take these strategies into careful consideration to most successfully engage the public.



## **Introduction**

One can throw graphs and figures, statistics and facts at the masses, attempting to sway them to care for a certain issue, to act upon something that matters. However, this championing of statistics and facts often falls upon deaf ears. This is a common issue for activists and people who aim to change the society in which we live. It is the struggle to make others care enough to take action. I believe that art is a solution; it exists as a vehicle of societal change and can be used to do what the facts and figures cannot, to make people care. Whether these societal constructs are challenged on the surface of city walls in 15 countries around the world or at the local grocery store, I view my work as a form of social experimentation and connection. In the public realm, I not only question the hierarchy of power, but also strive to deconstruct and subvert cultural expectations. Art becomes powerful in both form and function through creative nonconformity. Employing the symbolic form of art engages the viewer's emotion through poetics and allows for a connection to be established. This connection acts as the necessary catalyst for activist artwork to make its debut. The artist, as an intellectual, has a specific role to play within society: to challenge systems of power and to exist as an agent of societal change. To accomplish these goals the artist must implement various methodologies that succeed in both poetics as well as action.

## **Intellectuals as Agents of Power**

In discussing the intellectual's approach to power, Michel Foucault, the famous French historian and social theorist, describes the need for intellectuals to maintain an active role in the challenging and questioning of power within society. Amongst Foucault's beliefs is the idea that truth is power and power is truth.<sup>1</sup> That being said, power does not reside within a select few or solely in governmental structures. Rather, it exists within every institution in some way, shape, or form and every intellectual is an agent of that power. According to Foucault, the intellectual needs to reveal to the general public and to the world the systems and mechanisms of power that exist around us, as they often seem invisible.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as purveyors of power ourselves, we as intellectuals must use our specific skill sets and knowledge as mechanisms of power. Intellectuals are at their most instrumental when they can transcend beyond complicated vernacular and move into a realm of connection that reveals the framework of the powers that be.<sup>3</sup> The artist as intellectual excels, or should excel, in this realm of instrumentality.

I believe that it is in this sphere of thought that a crucial role of the artist within society comes into play. Artists, as intellectuals, are instrumental in questioning authority, even their own authority. The artist and intellectual's function as an agent of change, at its best, operates in the challenging of "habitual ways of working and thinking," as Foucault describes.<sup>4</sup> Through actively challenging the habitual systems of thought and power, the artist becomes the agent of change that society necessitates. However, how can we as artists move beyond mere objects and into art that exists simultaneously in action?

A great example of an artist acting as an agent of change is the “Obey the Giant” project created by Shepard Fairey. Originally starting out as an inside joke, Shepard Fairey began disseminating posters, stickers, and stencils of Andre the Giant, a former wrestling star. As the project grew in scale and Fairey expanded the project to an international audience, he realized that the mundane image of a random wrestling star, “gained real power through perceived power.”<sup>5</sup> It was not the image itself that held power, rather, the mass dissemination of images within the public realm and the proliferation of them led people to believe that Andre the Giant was an icon of significance. This unhesitating belief gave the image its power. Through this project, Fairey is able to bring to the surface a considerable problem that exists within our human nature. All too often, we accept without question the ideas and beliefs thrust upon us within our daily lives. It is similar to how public space has been taken over by advertisers. Street artists like Shepard Fairey are actively taking back a territory once lost to corporations and advertisers.

### **Symbolic and Actual**

In Pablo Helguera’s book, “Education for Socially Engaged Art,” he separates two distinct forms of the socially and politically focused art practice into what he defines as the symbolic and actual. The “symbolic” relies on representation and allegory in discussing ideas. The “actual” focuses on the functionality and effectiveness of the art. I am interested in a healthy marriage of both these forms of practice. I want to use representation to poetically connect with an audience, while at the same time utilizing critical thinking to strategically address the needs at hand.<sup>6</sup>

In some instances, the creation of dialogue within a community may be the most effective means in which to create the change that is needed. For example, an artist confronting the issue of the international AIDS epidemic must bring awareness to the problem. This is especially true for issues such as AIDS where awareness helps slow down the spread of the disease. However, how can the artist actively move beyond bringing awareness to simultaneously engaging the issue by helping those who are currently undergoing treatment or in need of treatment worldwide? This duality of artistic involvement is crucial to how I view my work progressing.

I have often been asked when working with various nonprofits if “this is art.” Pablo Helguera touches on this dichotomy by saying that, “socially engaged art is a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art, and its state may be permanently unresolved.”<sup>7</sup> I am a person first and an artist second. My innate longings as a person to help my fellow man come before the question of whether or not something is art. It begs the question; does art get in the way of functionality and the actual fulfilling of needs? I believe that I am indeed at fault in this manner. I have been so focused on the artistic product that I disregarded the actual function of the work. While the final product is undeniably important, of equal significance is the functionality this work is imparting for the greater good. The two forms of art are most effective when they work together. It seems that in teetering on the edge of art and non-art, socially engaged art most successfully addresses communal needs.

Over the past six years, I have installed work on the streets of 15 different countries with the intention of bringing awareness to the issue of child homelessness. Through this experience of creating work within the public realm, I found that dialogue

was not enough. While it did bring awareness to large audiences, there was no anchor point in which the awareness generated could siphon funds or resources into actively resolving the issue at hand. In 2012, I took this global project to Thailand and lived in an orphanage in order to become more acquainted with the plight of the people to whom I was bringing awareness. Living at the orphanage, I began to realize that perhaps my artwork was simply discussing the issue rather than actively engaging it. This realization led to my interest in exploring the dichotomy of dialogue as the symbolic form of socially engaged art, and an anchor point for funneling resources as the actual form of socially engaged art.

It is beneath this dichotomy that a tug of war surfaces within my work. On one hand, I do see the importance of dialogue that the symbolic allows. However, I have come to understand that social needs are more immediately fulfilled through the functionality of art. This is precisely why I believe a marriage of the two forms is the best approach. I believe that the symbolic is transferable to the actual because the symbolic often acts as the bridge between the audience and the artwork. This connection is critical as it is what makes art such a fertile means for inciting social change. Art does what charts and graphs cannot do. It connects with an audience and makes them care. You can scream statistics into the ears of an audience, but until you humanize the issue it does not become relatable. The symbolic acts as a vehicle for people to connect with the actual, which in turn directly fulfills the needs of those the artist aims to assist.

This realization has led to the current project that I am embarking upon in collaboration with the Do Art Foundation and the Children's Hunger Fund. I will be operating in a similar manner as I did in Asia (Figure 1). However, this time an anchor

point will be provided by the Children's Hunger Fund as well as the artistic organizational assistance of the Do Art Foundation. I will travel to four different cities: Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles. In each city, I will create portraits of three different children who have been assisted by the Children's Hunger Fund.



Figure 1. Michael Aaron Williams, *Untitled*, pen and ink on cardboard, installed in Kunming, China. 2012

With the Children's Hunger Fund's international network of food distribution, the artwork can act as a media device that functions to not only stir public consciousness, but also offer an outlet for that compassion. Rather than attempting to create a network in order to help with the physical meeting of needs, I will utilize the preexisting platform that the Children's Hunger Fund provides. This organization already has all the

mechanisms intact in order to fulfill the needs of the cause. I believe it is in this manner that the art not only exists as an object, but through collaboration, it simultaneously exists as an action. In this way, the art operates as “living form.”<sup>8</sup> It transcends beyond a conglomerate of materials and goes on to operate within the real world. Artist Tania Bruguera states, “I don’t want an art that points at a thing, I want an art that is the thing.”<sup>9</sup> The artwork as living form in this case extends beyond its functionality into the organic nature of its dissemination. This is one of many instruments of change that I implement within my art practice.

### **Instruments of Change**

Since I am interested in instrumentality and the function of the artist within society, it becomes crucial to discover various tools that aid the artist in this undertaking. In order to change the society in which we live, the artist needs to define what is truly needed before painting the first brushstroke. Dr. Martin Luther King once stated, “Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.”<sup>10</sup> It is impossible to enact change while conforming to societal norms, as these norms are often what need to be challenged. It is human nature to attempt to conform and fit in to society. However, Dr. King suggests that this act of being well-adjusted is not always advantageous to creating positive change in the world around us. In his November 1954 speech, “Transformed Nonconformist,” King gives the example of many white Americans who felt strongly about equal rights for African Americans, yet they did not actively participate in the Civil Rights movement because they feared standing alone. The fear of being maladjusted by standing up against societal pressure is enough to discourage many artists from taking

advantage of socially engaged art as a method of activism. King himself said that living a maladjusted life is not free of tribulations. He had to answer his daughter's confused questions about why her father was in jail so much. However, King describes this maladjusted life as necessary and crucial to changing the world around us. I believe this same maladjusted spirit can bring forth new and effective forms of art-making. It is through creative nonconformity that art becomes powerful in both form and function.<sup>11</sup> The role of the artist in the world exists far beyond the gallery walls and can be instrumental in solving some of the world's most pressing issues.

### **Augustus Caesar: The Context of Dissemination**

In the ancient world, the subject matter of graffiti ranged from the mundane to the political. In one instance, a disgruntled citizen of Rome held many grievances towards Augustus Caesar. Rather than discussing these grievances in the comfort of his home, he decided to etch them onto the actual statue of Augustus Caesar.<sup>12</sup> The context is significant. The disgruntled citizen not only listed his grievances in the public realm, but he did so in a site-specific manner directed towards the very person to whom he objected.

With this emphasis on context in relation to subject matter, I began executing various public experimentations. I wanted to discuss the disconnect that exists between Americans and our food sources, as well as the ethical implications. Therefore, I chose to discuss this idea in the place where this disconnect occurs, the grocery store. For this project, I wanted to confront the public with the reality of their food sources by installing sculptures of small piglets that posed as actual products in the store. I branded the sculptures as if they were a product of an actual company and created a corresponding



website, [www.flyingpigmeats.com](http://www.flyingpigmeats.com). Having grown up on a farm, I realized there is a difference between slaughtering an animal myself and buying meat in the store.



Figure 2. Michael Aaron Williams, *Flying Pig Meats*, sculptural installation, 2014

When I had no idea where the meat came from, I found it significantly easier to gorge myself on the meat. On the other hand, when I raised the animal and killed it myself, the memory of its infancy and the gruesome reality of its slaughter stayed in my mind. It became more difficult to eat an overabundance of meat. This installation of the piglets in the context of the supermarket is comparable to the Roman citizen who inscribed his issues with Caesar on a public statue of Caesar. For the artist, this use of public space creates an opportunity to fracture the institutional barrier that often exists between the general public and the art world.

It is no secret that a vast number of the public feel alienated or otherwise deceived when they visit art institutions and view the art within them. Clement Greenberg touched on this when he said that it takes time and money in order to fully appreciate the avant-garde, and this is certainly true for much of today's contemporary art.<sup>13</sup> It is difficult for the general public, with no significant art education, to understand how Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" is worth even looking at, let alone valued at millions of dollars. Therefore, when they see art that they feel is created for a 1% audience of perceived elites, a wall is erected. However, through the utilization of context in the public domain, artwork can extend beyond the realm of elitism and transition into a socially engaged art form. Public artwork is not placed in an environment with the intention of making money or asserting an elitist idealism, but rather to connect with an audience. Furthermore, the unexpected presentation of the art connects with viewers on a personal level. The power of context and its influence on perception is an intrinsic aspect of human nature; we cannot help being affected by it.

There are numerous examples of artists utilizing existing environments to add a political or social context to the work. One such example is a project by JR, a Parisian street artist who created large-scale installations on the streets of Brazil's favelas. The population of Brazil's favelas is approximately 12 million, and there seems to be a never ending cycle of poverty that exists within these slums.<sup>14</sup> However, where the favela ends you can often find lavish sky rise apartments with balconies that peer over the endless sprawl of poverty, showcasing the extreme separation of the extravagantly rich and the bitterly poor (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Tuca Vieira, *Favela Paraisópolis*, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2005



Figure 4. JR, *Women are Heroes*, Brazil, 2008-2009



These favelas also create a hotspot for tourists to take bus tours of the favelas and observe how these people live their lives. The favelas and its inhabitants have been turned into a spectacle. To combat this, JR took photographs of the favela's inhabitants and printed their eyes through the use of a large format printer. He then began to paste these massive eyes and faces of the community onto the walls of the favelas, turning the favelas from an object into an observer. Rather than objectifying the poverty of the inhabitants of the favelas, JR worked with the community to give them eyes to peer back at the world. Instead of beautifying the walls, JR humanized them. Successful interventionist street artists do not simply use public space as a canvas; they activate it by bringing societal issues to the forefront of the community's conscious.

### **Art as a Media Device and the Instrumentality of Dissemination**

The utilization of platforms is crucial to the use of art as a media device and its method of dissemination. Graffiti artists, for example, use existing platforms; the graffiti artist in many ways spearheaded the use of both the wall and trains. A wall cannot be a platform unless it exists within a space that can be seen organically. The wall in my studio is not a platform. However, the wall that exists outside my studio, in the public realm, is indeed a platform. It is a mechanism that allows me to connect in an organic manner to the world at large. Walls, however, are static. They don't move and graffiti artists understood this, which led to the immense targeting of subway cars in the 1970's and 80's. Where a wall could reach hundreds, a train could reach hundreds of thousands and be used as a method of dissemination to the masses.



Figure 5. Photographer Henry Chalfant, *Untitled*

In a similar way, when creating work in a public context, I use the internet as a platform for engaging a global audience. In 2010, I first began experimenting with the further dissemination of my street art through the broader platform that the internet allowed. At the time, I was simply traveling to various countries throughout Europe installing work on the walls of the cities that I traveled through. I would apply a piece I had made on cardboard onto the wall, document it, and leave. I found I could reach a hundred or possibly a thousand people through the use of the wall. However, the ephemeral nature of this practice all but guaranteed the artwork would be destroyed within two weeks, or even overnight.



Figure 6. Michael Aaron Williams, *Untitled*, acrylic and ink on cardboard, installed in Paris, France. 2010

Therefore, I decided to distribute the documentation of the work on the streets to websites, and to my surprise those websites featured my work. Overnight, hundreds of thousands of people from various cultures, backgrounds, and walks of life experienced the artwork. Better yet, the internet gave the work a permanence that the streets disallowed. It was as if the internet gave the work wings that enabled it to be delivered and shared to the world. This organic ability also allowed for the artwork to exist as a seemingly living form once it left my hands on the streets.

## Illegality: A Necessity in Challenging Authority Structures

The freedom of creation is one of the reasons why street art has become such a global phenomenon. Examples of this creative freedom manifest themselves differently, and new approaches to the freedoms of the unsolicited realm are constantly being explored. For instance, revolutionary messages and ideals were conveyed and discussed on the walls of Egypt during the recent Arab Spring. Egyptian street artists also used the walls to memorialize those who were beaten and killed by the government in an attempt to silence their voices (Figure 7). This act of defiance exemplifies the functionality of unsolicited art as well as its power to incite societal change. The murals created a physical place for the community to rally around to effectively subvert the authority of the Egyptian government. This is an extreme instance of the utilitarian aspects of unsanctioned art, but its effectiveness extends to all cultures as a means of discussing society on the walls of society. These guerilla tactics effectively translate to all cultures and moments in history.



Figure 7. Artist Unknown, *Mohamed Mahmoud Mural* (suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com)

It is important to point out that the subversion of power within the example of the Egyptian Arab Spring did not exist solely in what was represented on the wall. Arguably, more meaning could be found in the unsanctioned action of creating the work on the wall. The action in itself is a symbol of opposition; it undermines the Egyptian government and calls for a proverbial rallying of troops. In the book, *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art*, it eloquently states the importance of conveying ideas within the public space by saying: “If we are to believe in the power of ideas, as we must, we must understand that it is not in the thoughts we keep to ourselves, but only in sharing them that ideas attain their potential. This is the primary reason that public space offers such a fertile tableau for unsolicited artistic expression.”<sup>15</sup>

There are a number of advantages to compare between sanctioned and unsanctioned art forms in the public realm. The most notable disadvantage of the sanctioned is the censoring of the final product through the red tape that exists when asking for permission. Having personally operated in both a sanctioned and unsanctioned manner, this hindrance is by far the most limiting. Furthermore, this process is problematic because it takes away the freedom necessary for the artist to agitate and disrupt the daily lives of the general public. This freedom, of course, is a crucial element in the role of the artist as an agent of change.

The mindset that exists within unsanctioned art is not a new phenomenon, and the ideologies represented can be related to interventionist artists like Lewis Hine. Hine used art as a vehicle in which to agitate and enact social change. Like many modern street artists, Hine had to skirt around the issue of permission in order to create his photographs of child labor in the early 1900’s. Hine used trickery to obtain the shots needed to expose



the existence of child labor, as the owners and managers of the factories would not have allowed him to photograph if they knew his intentions. Hine's photographs subsequently became instrumental in the creation of child labor laws as he accurately depicted the harsh working conditions of child labor. He piqued the public's conscious and revealed an otherwise invisible issue.<sup>16</sup>

Another example of this manner of infiltration and impersonation within the contemporary art world is the activities of the Yes Men. The Yes Men work in a more aggressive manner than Lewis Hine, but the concept is still very similar. In 2004, the Yes Men impersonated a Dow Chemical spokesman on a BBC news program that reached millions of people worldwide. In the interview, the Yes Men announced that Dow Chemical would take full responsibility for the Bhopal disaster that occurred 20 years prior. This disaster occurred under the ownership of Union Carbide, a company that Dow Chemicals had just procured.



Figure 8. The Yes Men, Bhopal Disaster Dow Chemical Hoax, 2004

Though the Bhopal disaster was the worst industrial disaster of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only a meager \$2,000 had been paid to the families of those that died. The Yes Men, under the guise of a Dow spokesperson, declared to the world on international news that Dow was going to take full responsibility for the actions of Union Carbide. The Yes Men claimed Dow was going to liquidate Union Carbide for \$12 billion in order to clean up the site of the disaster, provide adequate health care for the still-suffering victims, as well as look into the other hazardous materials that Dow was producing. Of course, none of this was true, but the media took this news and ran with it. Within 23 minutes, Dow's market valuation fell over \$2 billion. More importantly, after 20 years of the world seeming to forget about one of its most horrible industrial disasters, Bhopal was once again being

discussed. Through the illegal action of the Yes Men, Dow was again put under international pressure.<sup>17</sup>

### **Inside-Out Critique**

However, an artist's instrumentality is not entirely dependent on their utilization of the unsanctioned. Many artists can successfully use the sanctioned in an effective manner to enact change. It is crucial for artists to take advantage of every opportunity, whether or not it is sanctioned. The transition of street artists to galleries and the art market has been a point of contention amongst the purveyors of the unsanctioned. Street artists now face the challenge of trying to maintain their integrity when they challenge consumerism on the streets because they are actively partaking in and benefiting from the art market. However, street artists must grasp the opportunity to infiltrate the social structure and critique consumerism from the inside.

One example of this inside-out manner of critique is Banksy, the most well-known street artist in the world. For decades, Banksy anonymously created work on the streets, actively critiquing consumerism on the walls of society (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Banksy, *Very Little Helps*, street installation, 2008

Eventually, the art market exploded with a craving for anything Banksy. Walmart began selling Banksy t-shirts, gallery shows were sold out, and countless invitations from media outlets to work with them on projects were received. Rather than allow the media circus to become a hindrance, Banksy embraced the attention. In 2010, Banksy accepted an invitation from 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox to direct the opening introduction for an episode of the Simpsons. Banksy took the opportunity to critique the consumerism within 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox by depicting the sweatshops and cheap labor they use in order to operate (Figure 10). Banksy critiqued the ethics of their business model from a completely sanctioned, even invitational, standpoint.



Figure 10. Banksy, Simpsons Commission, 2010

Banksy has even challenged the “hand that feeds him” by poking fun at collectors for buying his/her work. At Sotheby’s auction house in London in 2007, Banksy’s artwork sold for well over two hundred thousand pounds. In response, Banksy put a new image up on his/her website depicting an auction house with a framed piece of artwork that said, “I can’t believe you morons actually buy this shit” (Figure 11). In a wholly sanctioned manner, Banksy successfully challenged the art collectors clamoring over his/her work simply because it was popular at the moment.



Figure 11. Banksy, *Morons*, 2007

### **Per Veritatem Vis**

For my most recent work, I was given the opportunity to exhibit within the walls of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. This show was in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Fine Arts degree from Washington University. Since this piece was to hold within it the essence of my artistic practice, it was quite literally my masterpiece. As I reflected on how to best seize this opportunity, I recognized the situation as an impossibility. How could I use both the actual and the symbolic in a singular work, confined within the walls of an institution? The context of the institution quite honestly seems to be the antithesis of the projectile of my artistic practice. Under the premise that the challenging of authority is essential to the intellectual artist's function, I directed the concept of this new piece towards challenging the authority of the institution in which the piece will reside. To be more precise, I sought to challenge the current societal mentality that equates the university with corporations. Strategically, I

aimed to accomplish this using an inside-out method similar to that of Banksy's Simpsons' commission.

Just as the Roman citizen publicly posted his grievances on the statue of Augustus Caesar, I aim to challenge the institution from within its own walls. The piece entitled *Per Veritatem Vis*, named after the motto of Washington University in St. Louis, is overwhelming in its size as it stretches 21 feet tall by 10 feet wide. The surface of the work is made of century old ledger paper; the scribbling accounts of items bought and sold are preserved in this relic of the past. It is an altar of American capitalism. The ledgers also symbolize the perseverance of small town American families to provide for and create a better life for their families. This chronicle of former lives creeps up the wall as a different scenario altogether emerges. A mule is depicted at the bottom, suspended in the air and rendered immobile by an overburdened cart. At the top of the piece, seated atop a towering cacophony of boxes, sits a content bear, the mascot of the university. Both the mule and the bear are unable to progress forward into the future. In a static position, they are mutually vulnerable, as represented by the plethora of arrows buried into every aspect of the piece. When the students cease to move forward, the same fate awaits the institution.

We as students went to school to gain "strength through truth," as the motto of the university states. We want to become more knowledgeable, but also become more capable of providing for our families. Society tells us that a degree is the necessary step towards accomplishing this goal. However, statistics show that of the 2 million fine art graduates in the United States, a mere 10% actually receive most of their income from being working artists. In fact, the statistics suggest that receiving a degree renders you

less likely at becoming a full time working artist. While 16% of working artists have an art degree, comparatively, 40% of working artists have no degree at all. This implies that the average person is 2.5 times more likely to be a working artist had they never gone to art school.<sup>18</sup> However, 11 of the top 15 most expensive institutions in the country are art schools.<sup>19</sup> Thus, job outlook coupled with the low return on investment makes it very apparent to see how debt is quickly and cripplingly accrued amongst art school graduates. Furthermore, it is this accrued debt that causes students to become unable to make art, rendering us as infertile as the mule depicted in the piece. The education obtained in the hopes of a better life may come at too high a cost. Art is in many ways a marriage; it is a constantly evolving relationship that needs to be nurtured to thrive. However, just as in a spousal marriage, we can become divorced from art-making and the top reasons for both these forms of divorce revolves around finances.

I long for people to see the chasm that exists between the academic art world and practicing artists. This is a severe issue that is not being addressed. It is easy for art schools to champion artists like the Yes Men, who challenge corporations like Dow Chemical. However, we often refuse to look at ourselves as purveyors of power. Our actions play a significant part in these systems of power that can and do ruin many people's lives, or at least indebt them for the entirety of their lives. Institutions like Washington University hold a position of power, and the way in which they wield this power has dramatic results on the lives of students, faculty, and alumni. It is crucial to critique the manner in which this power is used. Is the institution aiding in the students' quest to become a working artist? Or, as the statistics imply, are they actually negating this goal?



## Conclusion

Art has the power to accomplish what charts and cold facts often cannot: an emotional impact upon the viewer. Here, the symbolic form of socially engaged art is key. The poetic symbolism engages people and allows them to forge a connection with the artwork. While I recognize this interaction as critical, I believe an artist combining both the symbolic form of art with the actual form reaches their highest potential. The actual form, as employed by artists like Banksy, the Yes Men, and Lewis Hines, creates a tangible reactive consequence. In terms of unsanctioned art, the Yes Men's phony Dow Chemical spokesperson impersonation actually generated a \$2 billion drop in the company's market price in under an hour. More significantly, this ploy sparked remembrance and concern over the mishandling of the Bhopal disaster and the families involved. This challenging of authority is an excellent example of the artist acting as an agent of power. Artists, as intellectuals, have a responsibility to address these social hardships through the artwork they create. Context, dissemination and collaboration are a few of the strategies that can be implemented to most successfully engage the public. Incorporating and perfecting these methodologies to forge an even deeper connection with the audience is the driving force of my artistic practice.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," In *The Chomsky–Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: New Press: 2006), 160-171.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd Andrew, comp., "Intellectuals and Power." In *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* (New York: OR Books, 2012), 240-241.

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky and Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," 160-171.

<sup>4</sup> Sylve Lotringer, ed., *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 462-463.

<sup>5</sup> *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. Performed by Thierry Guetta, Shepard Fairey, Invader. (2010; UK: Revolver Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

<sup>6</sup> Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 5-25.

<sup>7</sup> Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 5-25.

<sup>8</sup> Nato Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (New York: Creative Time, 2012), 18-45.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *Living as Form*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> "Transformed Nonconformist," *The King Center*, Accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/transformed-nonconformist#>.

<sup>11</sup> "Transformed Nonconformist," *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project*, Accessed March 20, 2015, <http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol6/Nov1954TransformedNonconformist.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Keegan. *Graffiti in Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2014), Xii.

<sup>13</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," In *Art and Culture; Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 9.

<sup>14</sup> "United, Slums and Communities form the 5<sup>th</sup> Largest State in the Country," *Carta Capital*, Last Modified February 20, 2013, Accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.cartacapital.com.br/sociedade/unidas-favelas-e-comunidades-formariam-o-5o-maior-estado-do-pais/>

<sup>15</sup> Carlo McCormick, Ethel Seno, and Marc & Sara Schiller. "Magical Thinking." In *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art* (Taschen, 2010), 220.

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<sup>16</sup> "Teaching With Documents: Photographs of Lewis Hine: Documentation of Child Labor." *National Archives and Records Administration*, Accessed April 11, 2015, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/hine-photos/>.

<sup>17</sup> *The Yes Men Fix the World*. Directed by Jacques Servin, Igor Vamos, and Kurt Engfehr (UK: Docurama, 2009), DVD.

<sup>18</sup> Jahoda, Susan, Blair Murphy, Vicky Virgin, and Caroline Woolard. "Artists Report Back: A National Study on the Lives of Arts Graduates and Working Artists." *BFAMFAPhD* (2014): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Roberto Ferdman, "If You're Lucky Enough to Earn a Living from Your Art, You're Probably White." *Washington Post*, Last Modified October 21, 2014, Accessed April 21, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2014/10/21/if-youre-lucky-enough-to-earn-a-living-from-your-art-youre-probably-white/>.

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