MAKING PLACE WORK: SITE-SPECIFIC SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART IN 21st CENTURY TORONTO

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Abstract

Site-specific socially engaged art practices are on the rise, particularly in cities. Global migration, global networks and online communication notwithstanding, artists, curators and cultural institutions are increasingly working to "activate" audiences in and through local encounters premised on shared exploration of specific urban sites. What kinds of social engagement are made possible through these local encounters? And what kinds of engagement are precluded or overlooked when artists try to engage their publics site-specifically? This dissertation considers site-specific socially engaged art in the context of 21st Century Toronto, a city that is rife with multiple historical and ongoing displacements and that is also facing new challenges, including increasing spatial polarization along class and race lines and considerable political apathy. Drawing both on critical theories of place and contemporary literature on socially engaged art, I offer a new set of criteria for analysis of site-specific social engagement, as well as three in-depth examinations of site-specific socially engaged art practices. I look at the work of REPOhistory (New York, 1989-2000), Jumblies Theatre (Toronto, 2001-) and DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY (Toronto, 2011-). My analysis suggests that social engagement premised on site-specificity is promising, in that it can foster new forms of civic dialogue, but is ideally approached with a fluid spatial imagination, relationally specific awareness of urban dynamics, and close attention to social conflicts. This dissertation contributes to the emergent literature on creative placemaking and to the burgeoning scholarship on socially engaged art.

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Introduction

"The potential of an activist art practice that raises consciousness about land, history, culture, and place and is a catalyst for social change cannot be underestimated, even though this promise has yet to be fulfilled." (Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, 19)

"Only those cultural practices that have…[a] relational sensibility can turn local encounters into long-term commitments and transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks…" (Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 166)

In Toronto, an audio documentary project that offers site-specific stories to pedestrians through their phones. In Montreal, an exhibit of graphic compositions related to the history of St. Laurent Boulevard, mounted on storefronts. Critical walking tours in Chicago and New York; participatory mapping in Los Angeles and London; a private apartment turned public art space in Istanbul; public parks turned cultural hubs, participatory parades animating urban streets; neighbourhood memory walks and lived history projects; facilitated conversations about urban futures, hosted in public space; urban redevelopments led by artists.[1] Participatory art that engages with urban sites has burgeoned in the past decade and continues apace. Countless examples of individual projects, a rash of global art festivals premised on explorations of the social, economic and ecological features of their host cities and increasing buzz about "creative placemaking" from funders and policy-makers in the United States and Canada all point to artistic animation of the urban "local" as a widespread phenomenon.[2]

The trend toward participatory site-specific art is part of a broader resurgence of participatory art, also known as socially engaged art or, in North America, simply as "social practice."[3] While art has arguably always been socially engaged,[4] this resurgence emphasizes the production of new social

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relationships rather than art objects per se. Social practice typically involves public participation in some sort of extended process of meaning making (be it a group conversation or the building of a physical asset like a house). In light of their commitment to public engagement, social practice artists tend to relinquish at least some control over both the artistic process and the final product (if there is one at all).[5] A "hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art"[6] social practice seeks to "affect…the public sphere in a deep and meaningful way,"[7] to "activate the audience", often blurring the line between artist and audience altogether,[8] and to provoke civic dialogue and action outside of specialized art contexts. Social practice has grown exponentially in Canada and the United States in recent years. It is, in fact, considered a "near global phenomenon,"[9] though work outside of North America is beyond the purview of this dissertation. The upsurge in social practice has prompted new debates on the types of social engagement artists should foster. Should they nurture solidarities or create productive unease?[10] A spate of literature proposing critical frameworks through which to evaluate participatory art is emerging as this field continues to grow.[11]

Notwithstanding these useful new analyses of collaboration and participation, the role of the local as a basis for social engagement in participatory art remains under-examined. Despite global migration, global networks and ever-increasing access to online communication, a vast number of artists, curators and cultural institutions continue to strive to "activate" audiences in and through local encounters premised on shared exploration of a specific

urban site. Nato Thompson, curator of *Creative Time*, describes social practice as premised on a desire to make works that are "explicitly local, long-term, and community based."[12] A commitment to long-term work with a specific community of people is a hallmark of the ever-growing field of community art practice[13] and explorations of the physical make-up of specific neighbourhoods, the relationships within them and the narratives that shape them, are still commonplace in this field.[14] Site-specific performance practices continue to diversify and flourish, "working over…the production, definition and performance of 'place'"[15] through soundwalks, guided tours, scripted suggestions for public behaviour and other participatory experiences. And counter-monumental art practices, which illuminate human rights abuses and social injustice via specific sites, also continue to emerge.[16] These different lineages of contemporary socially engaged art all draw on local places as a source for and site of productive social engagement. But is site-specificity a productive premise for social engagement in the 21st century global city?

What kinds of social engagement are made possible through site-specific artistic practices? And what kinds of engagement are precluded or overlooked when artists try to engage their publics through explorations of specific urban sites? These are the questions I examine in this dissertation.

Site-specificity in the 21st Century: The Enduring 'Lure of the Local'[17]

The cultural production of locality is a historical global phenomenon.[18] The desire to make links between the physical, emotional, spiritual and political contours of a

place and the identities of social groups; personal desires to understand how one does or doesn't belong in a place or how it has shaped one's life; a desire to find a connection to a new place one inhabits; these impulses have fuelled countless projects, cultural products and artistic journeys. Place-making projects have always been both central to the making of culture[19] and fraught (one need only think of imperial fantasies and constructions, nationalist exclusions and claims to rootedness). They remain perilous and only become more complicated in an era of increased global migration and global communication. Which places do individuals or groups turn to today if they are searching for identity or roots? What does a "sense of place" place mean in ever-changing urban environments, which most inhabitants are at most ambivalently psychically connected to? These are complex and enduring questions.

Despite a "dramatically delocalized world"[20] art historian Miwon Kwon argued in 2002 that "the phantom of a site as an actual place remains, and our psychic, habitual attachment to places regularly returns as it continues to inform our sense of identity."[21] Not only is this still true over a decade later but, in light of socially engaged art's current status as the avant-garde practice *par excellence*,[22] it is arguable that suspicion of claims to "groundedness" as "artistically retrograde"[23] have in fact diminished somewhat since Kwon's *One Place After Another* was published. Before I lay out the details of my research on socially engaged site-specific art, I want to review some of the artistic motivations for a continued focus on urban places in 21st Century socially engaged art. Urbanization; a spatial turn in academia and beyond; a "memory boom"; and,

widespread focus on place differentiation in light of globalization are all backdrops to today's artistic animations of urban sites. In Canadian cities, growing spatial polarization and creative city discourse and policies have also contributed to the proliferation of site-specific participatory practices. Taken together, these forces provide some reasons and context for contemporary site-specific social practice.

Some Reasons Why Site-Specificity Endures

A continued and growing faith in urban sites as fertile ground for social engagement is perhaps not surprising given both that the world is increasingly urban[24] and that we have experienced a cross-disciplinary spatial turn,[25] through it is now widely understood both that space is socially constructed[26] and that the social construction of space is closely linked to the production of subjects.[27] Countless studies over the past twenty years by geographers and non-geographers alike have examined how systemic power is spatialized and how 'everyday' social spaces are, therefore, political.[28] Scholars and artists alike have been drawn to consider specific social spaces because close looks at these spaces can make visible the empirical and detailed ways in which power is maintained and contested. Marginalized groups have fought to claim urban spaces, if only temporarily, aware that to claim urban space is to claim citizenship.[29] There has also been significant scholarship on how neoliberalism operates through urban regulation and restructuring[30] and recognition of the neoliberalization of cities is seeping into the thinking of critical artists and cultural

institutions.[31] As Boudreau, Keil and Young frame it in relation to Toronto: "Urban politics regulates many of the contentious issues of globalizing societies: economic growth in an age of globalized markets, migration and settlement; police and social control; social services; environmental regulation; schools and education; and so on."[32]

It is widely agreed upon in the current literature on socially engaged art that the emergence of participatory art practices is, at least partially, a response to capitalism's global dominance.[33] Many socially engaged projects can be read as attempts to think through and practice alternatives to capitalist relations in the absence of a clearly articulated political alternative.[34] In light of both urbanization and the spatial turn (which was taken up in the visual arts as early as the 1990s)[35] it makes sense that specific urban dynamics and neighbourhoods have become ciphers for the marked inequalities and alienated relations produced by late capitalism. They are, after all, the sites through which more and more people experience these conditions. Urban places are also sites through which we encounter social, cultural and ideological differences, particularly in transnational cities, putting concepts of democracy to the test.[36] As radically different ideological visions for the future of social relations face off in the 21st Century, it should be no surprise that urban sites become ground zero of experiments in "better" relations.

Broadly, the spatial turn can be understood as an agreement across disciplines that "questions of locality, sense of place and of identity in place matter now more than ever" in light of globalization.[37] Artists and curators have

certainly not been immune to this idea. Over fifteen years ago, Lucy Lippard

referred to the desire for a more grounded sense of place in light of our

contemporary condition of "multicenteredness" as the "lure of the local."[38] While

Lippard notes that the lure of the local can manifest as a search for rootedness,

contributing to nationalism and xenophobia,[39] she argues for the potential of

critical responses to this 'lure.' I discuss the 'lure of the local' in greater depth

later in this Introduction. For the moment, its variances and dangers aside (as

important as they are), it important to recognize that desires for more grounded

and connected senses of place in response to a globalized world are part of the

context of site-specific art today.[40]

In addition, it is arguable that the so-called "memory boom," a

phenomenon also associated with anxiety about globalization[41] is contributing to

artistic animations of specific urban places.[42] Contemporary site-specific work

often draws on place as mnemonic device, a resource through which to prompt

memory. As I will discuss shortly with reference to Canadian urban contexts,

cities are sites of numerous historical displacements. A desire to put the past in

conversation with the present has led curators, artists and institutions to work

with specific urban sites, which can help to tell the stories of these

displacements. The goal of animating memory has particularly influenced the

field of site-specific performance. Working site-specifically, performance studies

scholar Gay McAuley argues, enhances "the creative agency of the spectators,

who bring their own knowledge and memories of that place (and others like it) to

the performance, thus unleashing a dynamic and volatile meaning making

process."[43] The local in this view is a productive site through which to animate the past and spark dialogue about the present and the future. Many counter-monumental art practices are also premised on the idea that site-specificity can produce a deeper affective relationship to the histories and issues they seek to present. This is a key premise in my own project *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY*, the focus of Chapter Six of this dissertation.[44]

Finally, a long-standing presumed relationship between face-to-face relations and "authentic" engagement both in political theory and in popular discourse[45] may also be contributing to the burgeoning of localized social engagement. Socially engaged art today can be understood not only as a response to capitalism but also a search for new democratic forms.[46] The idea that face-to-face interactions are unmediated and are therefore particularly potent sites of deliberative democracy continues to prevail, despite critical interventions by feminist and anti-racist scholars and activists.[47] Even as artists probe places as sites of social tension, they may yet conflate physical proximity and the potential of democratic engagement. This continued reification of face-to-face engagement is interesting in light of the proliferation of disembodied digital communications. Whether it is a form of response to this proliferation or not, I suspect that a deep-seeded belief that face-to-face interaction is more empowering, real or transformative than other forms of engagement is one of the reasons why a rise in social practice has been accompanied by a rise in artistic animations of the local.

A Complicated Terrain and a "Fuzzy" Field

Even as site-specific participatory practices may be driven and influenced by widespread phenomena like urbanization, the "spatial turn", the "memory boom" and searches for more engaged democratic forms, these practices are also driven by specific material forces and conditions in contemporary cities. Cities are sites of overlapping social, cultural and physical displacements, including the displacement of indigenous ecologies, First Nations people and cultures, recent immigrants, racialized groups, and poor and homeless populations.[48] In Canada, a pressing issue is continued polarization of cities along race and class lines. While scholars generally agree that ghettos like those in the U.S. are not in evidence in Canadian cities,[49] a growing gap between rich and poor is also playing out spatially in urban Canada, further entrenching divisions between "have" and "have not" neighbourhoods.[50] This "poverty by postal code"[51] is also racialized. In Toronto, for example, the city's downtown core is increasingly becoming the territory of the privileged, while average incomes in much of the north of the city have decreased significantly since the 1970s.[52] Middle-income neighbourhoods are disappearing and over 50% of the city now consists of low-income neighbourhoods.[53] The residents of these low-income areas are disproportionally racialized while the wealthiest neighbourhoods are 84% white.[54]

The further entrenchment of cities into have and have-not areas produces a broad social imperative to improve conditions in underserviced low-income neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood amelioration efforts come from all political vantage points. Proposed solutions for social problems in these urban

neighbourhoods range from crime prevention to broad redress of economic, racialized and gendered injustices.[55] Often blurring these ideological approaches, arts granting agencies have increasingly funded art as a means by which to address social problems in low-income neighbourhoods.[56] The devil is in the details of these projects. Many of them are undertaken by artists with critical intentions and focus on grassroots responses to injustice.[57] Progressive forces within Toronto, for example, have pushed for increased access to arts funding for residents of neighbourhoods that have been traditionally framed as off the cultural map of the city. A focus on "broken" neighbourhoods can, however, all too easily turn participatory art into what Ford-Smith calls "a brightly packaged form of welfare."[58]

In Toronto, the flip side of marginalized low-income pockets of the city is a process of gentrification, particularly in the downtown core. Gentrification displaces low-income people, who can't afford to compete with the comparatively rich for housing. Even for tenants with subsidized rent, life in gentrified areas becomes less and less tenable as affordable shopping options and essential services disappear. Gentrification processes also tend to violently displace street-involved people, particularly sex-workers and drug-users. These populations are driven out by new wealthy residents who see them as "undesirable" elements. Gentrification of urban neighbourhoods has prompted a range of artistic responses, from explicit support for new neighbourhood branding strategies to critical interventions.[59]

The enormously popular concept of the "Creative City"[60] has also contributed to site-specific participatory art. Widespread acceptance of the argument that place differentiation attracts capital to cities and to specific urban neighbourhoods has led to a model of intra-city competition, shaping municipal policies worldwide.[61] The Creative City model emphasizes the importance of drawing on arts and culture to create "authentic" sites that will market the city to upwardly mobile businesses and individuals.[62] As municipalities have taken up this idea and drafted their own Creative City plans, "creative placemaking" has become a significant funding priority[63] and site-specific artistic production has become increasingly equated with urban revitalization. Particularly in the United States, granting agencies like Artplace (a partnership between thirteen foundations and six major banks) are funding projects "committed to increasing the vibrancy and diversity of their communities."[64]

The current urban conditions I have just described both drive localized socially engaged art practices and contribute to the conditions in which these practices operate. These conditions are an important contextual backdrop for this study, as they make for a complicated terrain for artists interested in fostering civic dialogue and engagement via site-specific explorations or 'placemaking.'

Even as the terrain is complicated, the field of socially engaged art is diffuse and the social goals of participatory site-specific projects are often opaque. Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, an emerging expert on the phenomenon of "creative placemaking" in the United States has argued that creative placemaking is a form of "fuzzy vibrancy," in that it lacks a clear definition and loosely

conflates civic engagement with "regeneration" and "revitalization," which can be understood differently from a range of ideological perspectives (sometimes functioning as codes for gentrification).[65] The same can be said of socially engaged art, an overlapping field. The intentions behind site-specific socially engaged projects range dramatically. They can be undertaken in order to improve the moral character of their participants (by, for example 'correcting' juvenile 'delinquency').[66] They can claim or hope to foster social integration. They can represent demands for systemic change or for a 'right to the city.'[67] They can be undertaken in order to market a neighbourhood or site, making it more palatable to potential tourists or homeowners. Not only are the intentions behind socially engaged practices often opaque (blurring the goals I have just listed), but there is also always a gap between stated objectives and their execution. This is indeed a "fuzzy" field operating in a complex terrain. I elaborate further on the complex terrain of urban dynamics in Toronto in Chapter Four of this dissertation, where I provide a critical framework for evaluation of socially engaged site-specific art.

My project in the rest of this dissertation is not to identify the reasons for continued interest in fostering social engagement through the animation of a specific locality but to develop lenses through which to critically analyze the potential and perils of place-based socially engaged work in the context of the city I live and work in, Toronto. Both "site-specificity" and "participation" have functioned as *a priori* signifiers of criticality in contemporary art.[68] But what is the relationship between site-specificity and participation? How can participation via

site-specificity produce new social relations? As site-specific participatory practices continue to emerge we need to critically distinguish between them and to query their potential contextually.

Research questions

As I have already stated, my project here is to examine the relationship between site-specificity and social engagement in participatory artistic practices in North American cities, with a focus on Toronto. The primary questions that have guided my research are:

- **What kinds of social engagement are made possible through site-specific artistic practices?**

- **What kinds of engagement are precluded or overlooked when artists try to engage their publics through explorations of specific urban sites?**

- **How can site-specific practices challenge spatial practices of domination in urban settings?**

- **How can site-specific artistic engagement offer new political imaginaries? In other words, how can site-specific engagement contribute to democratic life?**

Underlying these primary questions linger larger questions regarding art's transformative potential and the diverse ways in which social change, democracy and "better relations" can be conceptualized. By looking at how particular site-

specific participatory art practices are fostering dialogue; shifting narratives and practices of place; creating new counter-public spheres; and, deepening senses of belonging in the city, I contribute to these broader debates.

Case Studies: Commonalities

My research questions, which I examine in the context of Toronto, have emerged out of years of experience working in the fields of activist art and community-based art (I discuss my own trajectory in Chapter Two, where I review my research methodology).[69] In order to answer my research questions I conduct a close examination of three examples of socially engaged site-specific art. I look at the work of the REPOhistory Collective (New York, 1989-2000), the *Bridge of One Hair* project, by Jumblies Theatre (Toronto, 2004-2008) and my own ongoing project *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY*, a collaboration with visual artist Elinor Whidden (Toronto, 2011-). I further explain my choice of case studies in my chapter on methodology but here I want to point out some of the shared aspects of these case studies. As I will outline, these case studies are similar in that they; seek to foster social change through site-specific art; begin with an understanding of place as contested; work with 'everyday' places; attempt to contribute to placemaking through narrative and images; and, draw on stories of the past in order to animate place.

The work of REPOhistory collective, Jumblies Theatre's *Bridge of One Hair* project and *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* are all examples of co-created art for social change. REPOhistory came together in order to contribute

to "strong, alternative social commentary"[70] and were committed to embodying radical left politics in their artistic process, working primarily by consensus and always collectively. *Bridge of One Hair* was a partnership between a museum, Toronto Community Housing Corporation and Jumblies Theatre. From the outset one of the project's key goals of the project was to forge new social relationships in the area. *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* began as a response to municipal budget cuts and co-creates commemorative signs for city services with the publics who use them. While close analysis of these three projects shows that they have taken up different approaches to social change, each of them is an overt attempt to foster social change through collective artistic production. This is symptomatic of social practice, which has "asserted a connection between user-generated content and democracy."[71] These projects desire to do more than contribute to the cultural realm. Rather they operate consciously in the political sphere.[72]

These projects are also all attempts to deepen a sense of place, to shift the mental and emotional associations with a particular place beyond assumed conventions. As I have already noted, social actors with a range of political perspectives support the idea that artists can contribute to healthier or better social relations in cities. While there are significant differences between the three case studies I look at, they all began with an interest in contesting place. These projects are attempts to make critical contributions to urban relations, though REPOhistory and *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* frame their work in more overt political terms than *Jumblies Theatre* does. The shared premise of

contesting place distinguishes these case studies from some other creative placemaking initiatives, particularly those that are attempts to revitalize neighbourhoods by attracting capital investment. In contradistinction to those efforts, each of these projects begins with an understanding of the city as a site of profound displacements and works to undermine the supposed neutrality of the city through narrative, images and engagement. These projects are attempts to co-author place that begin with a desire to assert a "right to the city".[73] The extent to which they might achieve this is the subject of my investigation here.

Unlike the vast majority of commemorative sites or monuments, these projects work to contest place through engagement with 'everyday' places; places that are not widely recognized as 'historical' or symbolically charged by culturally powerful institutions. When work is undertaken in and about 'everyday' places, artists have the dual challenge of telling the particular stories at hand and convincing their audience that stories about the place are even important at all. Sometimes even asserting that a place is worth looking at, that it has a history or a future worth examining, is in itself a radical undertaking. As I show in my chapter on *REPOhistory*, art that is undertaken in and about everyday places can call into question the very notion of 'public' space, belying its performance as neutral, innocent and accessible to all citizens.

It is also important to note that all of the projects I examine here work to engage their publics through the production of narratives and images. While some contemporary social practice does away with object making altogether, producing only dialogue and relationships,[74] in these projects social engagement

is fostered through the *making* of objects, texts, performances and representations and through *response* to objects, texts, performances and representations. REPOhistory produced site-specific street signs, visual art installations and, occasionally, site-specific performances. The *Bridge of One Hair* project entailed the creation of countless drawings, maps, costumes and props, as well as music and poetry, all of which fuelled an original theatre script and musical score and a final theatre production. The DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY makes commemorative signs and is developing an online archive. We also curate live performance events at which participants share memories related to specific sites and discuss their future.

Finally, these case studies have a shared interest in history and memory as a premise for dialogue about the future. Through these artistic practices, places in which history is not immediately apparent are infused with memories of the past. These practices deepen a sense of social history in relation to a particular place in order to expose conflicting and divergent narratives. Rather than assert one dominant story of place, they tend to draw their audiences into challenging conversations about social relationships in that place over time. While their site-specificity is the focus of my study here, this shared interest in history and memory could make for other interesting analyses.

Theoretical Foundations

This research is interdisciplinary. It takes up theories of place drawn from critical and feminist geographers as well as scholarship on social engagement and democracy from art historians and cultural critics. And, as is evident in Chapter

Four, where I offer critical lenses through which to analyze participatory site-specific projects, each of the fields engaged in this research is interdisciplinary unto itself. Geographers, anthropologists, philosophers, postcolonial theorists and, recently, art historians have all contributed to the scholarship on place.[75] Scholarship on socially engaged art draws on diverse theories of education, political theory and philosophy as well as art history.[76] To look critically at the relationship between site-specificity and social engagement, then, inevitably involves aligning oneself with certain theoretical approaches to the subject. I have drawn on the theories that have seemed most helpful in answering my research questions, with particular attention to those that have already entered interdisciplinary conversations on this subject. In particular, I see this dissertation as taking up a conversation on place and engagement started by art critic and historian Lucy Lippard in her 1997 book, *The Lure of the Local, and* continued by art historian Miwon Kwon in *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002) and, to a lesser extent, curator Claire Doherty in publications such as *Situation* (2009) and *Curating Wrong Places or Where Have All the Penguins Gone?* (2006). I elaborate on the broad strokes of this conversation here.

In her well-known book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, Lucy Lippard argues for a "multicentered" approach to place, an approach that recognizes that when "we enter a new place we become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity, which is really what all "local places" consist of. By entering that hybrid, we change it; and in each situation

we may play a different role."[77] While she offers numerous rich examples of critical place-specific art produced between the 1970s and 1990s, Lippard concludes *Lure of the Local* with a call for a new place-specific art, art which is: "specific…collaborative… generous and open-ended…appealing…simple and familiar… layered, complex and unfamiliar…evocative… provocative and critical."[78] Lippard asks: "What would it be like, this art produced in partnership with the imagination and responses of its viewers or users within a relational and reciprocal theory about our shared place and how it affects our lives?" The next step must be a leap of imagination", she writes.[79] Lippard goes on to outline the "far more perfect world" in which her vision of place-specific art would flourish, an "egalitarian" and "unbigoted" world in which art is fundamentally valued for its social importance.[80]

In her seminal work *One Place After Another: Site-specific art and Locational Identity* (published five years after *Lure of the Local*), art historian Miwon Kwon continues the conversation started by Lippard. Kwon critiques Lippard for failing to address the ways in which her own vision, which Kwon says is implicitly a vision of a "vernacular, nonurban sociality of small-scale spaces and face-to-face exchanges," contributes to the "machinations of capitalism itself."[81] "In the end", Kwon argues, Lippard views "the task of a progressive oppositional cultural practice…as a retrieval and resuscitation of a sense of place, a sense that ostensibly once was but now is lost."[82] Kwon calls instead for an approach that navigates between this nostalgic desire for the local and the contemporary "seductive allure of nomadism"[83] which, she contends, bears its

own "terrors and dangers".[84] For, while Kwon is critical of Lippard's iteration of the local, she is also critical of the ways in which uncertainty, fluidity and impermanence dominate current concepts of "a vanguard, politically progressive artistic practice,"[85] signifying a move away from place altogether. The vast majority of people still experience their daily lives in specific places, she reminds us, and we are differentially affected by today's globalized world. While for some global travel has indeed "shrunk" the world, for many others travel across a border a few miles away is out of reach.[86] Rather than abandon the specificities of place altogether, Kwon proposes that future artists approach site-specificity armed with the concept of the "wrong place", a concept which accounts for differential experiences of place and exposes the instability of any one place, its unfamiliarity, our lack of belonging in it.[87] Kwon calls on site-specific artists to be *relationally specific*, to be "*out* of place with punctuality and precision,"[88] working dialectically with "models of nomadism and sendentariness… space and place… digital interfaces and the handshake", to see these not as oppositions but as "*sustaining* relations."[89]

Both Lippard and Kwon, then, end with a provocation, a challenge to curators and artists to rethink the relationship between place and engagement. These provocations are still relevant today, perhaps even more so in that the decade since Kwon's publication has witnessed a proliferation of "community engaged" and "socially engaged" art; art that has moved back toward a focus on "grounded" collaboration and participation.

Lippard and Kwon's provocations have yet to be taken up in depth. The literature most responsive to their calls for new approaches to place has been by curator Claire Doherty, who begins to think through what it might mean to curate based on Kwon's notion of the "wrong place." Referencing critical theorists David Harvey and Doreen Massey (but not elaborating on why their theories particularly matter), Doherty asks important questions like: "If we subscribe to a notion of place as an intersection of social, economic and political relations, rather than a bounded geographic location, where and how does artistic engagement with the context of the exhibition start?"[90] Doherty does not engage, however, in any serious examination of what Kwon's "relational approach" to place might entail. She takes up Kwon's ideas insofar as they encourage site-specific art that disorients and defamiliarizes but does not deeply examine what it might mean to take a relational approach to place or what forms of dialogue are made possible by this approach.

In this dissertation I continue the conversation begun by Lippard, Kwon and Doherty, responding particularly to Lippard and Kwon's calls for different approaches to place-specific art. My project here is to closely analyze three site-specific projects that start with many of the same premises as Lippard concludes with. These are projects that strive to be specific, collaborative, open-ended and critical. They do this, however, not in a new utopian society but in the face of contemporary urban conditions. Interestingly, these projects also arguably begin with Kwon's premise; an intent to disorient, to contest, to expose the instabilities of place. I hope that these in-depth examinations can further elaborate on

Lippard and Kwon's calls for new approaches to place-based engagement. What can they teach us about the potential of social engagement premised on place, given the realities of contemporary cities? And how might we, in turn, rethink site-specificity in light of these realities?

Theoretical Contributions

As I have already noted, there is an ever-growing literature on socially engaged art. Much of this work has examined different genres of socially engaged art, such as activist art, community-based art, public art, counter-monuments or, site-specific performance.[91] Recently there has been a spate of new literature examining social engagement and participation as premises in contemporary art.[92] There have also been significant analyses of the relationships between art and urban space and, art and urban politics.[93]

What is still in need of further examination, however, is the premise of social engagement through artistic focus on specific urban sites. What is lost and what is gained when artists seek to engage their publics through explorations of place? Continuing the conversation started by Lippard, Kwon and Doherty, and keeping this conversation outside of any genre-specific boundaries is useful, as social practice today represents a merging of artistic lineages. Focusing on the context of Toronto is unique insofar as there is still a dearth of literature on social practice in a Canadian context, and useful in that Toronto shares its transnationality and increasing spatial polarization[94] with other global cities. Finally, applying interdisciplinary lenses to the relationship between site-

specificity and social engagement helps to address a "lack of resources in modern art theory for engaging with projects that are organized around a collaborative, rather than a specular relationship with the viewer."[95] Interdisciplinarity is needed when looking at social practice, as it is "a form of performance in the expanded field"[96] always at least partially in need of sociological analysis.[97] We need new ways of reading these projects, both in terms of the narratives and symbolism they produce *and* in terms of the social practices they foster.[98]

In order to continue the conversation started by Lippard, Kwon and Doherty, I bring in three interlocking but distinct fields of study. The first is **critical scholarship on place**. I focus on how different conceptualizations of place in turn alter concepts and practices of social engagement. When a project focuses on place, who is considered a participant to be engaged and who is considered outside of the bounds of the project? Work by scholars Arjun Appadurai, Arif Dirlik, David Harvey, and, especially, Doreen Massey informs my critical analysis of place itself. What is a "progressive sense of place" in a city like Toronto today?[99] If artists want to contribute to democratic engagement by working locally how should they conceptualize the local? In this work, place is an intermediary in the relationships created. How one conceptualizes place and how one relates to the specific place at hand produces meaning (both for participants and for audience members in any given project).[100] By applying critical scholarship on place to my analyses of *Bridge of One Hair* and *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC*

MEMORY I am able to examine how these projects conceive of 'local' engagement.[101]

The second body of literature I bring to this analysis is recent **critical scholarship on socially engaged art.** As I have already alluded to and discuss later in this introduction, social engagement is a vague term, which can indicate allegiance with almost any political position and can range from forced participation to tokenism to self-determination.[102] I bring in recent debates between proponents of socially antagonistic and "provocative" art and proponents of generative and "open" process-based art.[103] I add to these debates by considering the meaning of solidarity and introducing feminist scholar Bonnie Honig's concept of "dilemmatic space."[104] I link the concept of dilemmatic space to Massey's call for a broad geographical imagination, a "sense of place *beyond* place."[105] If we reconceptualize place we must also reconsider engagement. Drawing on recent work by Grant Kester and Claire Bishop, leading scholars on socially engaged art practices, I critically interrogate the explicit and implicit understandings of social engagement in each of my case studies. This work contributes to the debates around which forms of social engagement are potentially transformative, leading toward more just relations.[106]

The third element I bring to this question is a **close contextual read of the dynamics at play in Toronto today**, dynamics that are akin to, though not precisely the same as, those in many global cities. If "the city replaces the museum,"[107] then the city as context for the work must be examined closely. Just as earlier site-specific artists examined the social and economic dynamics

through which white cube of the gallery were produced, so too do we have to examine the social and economic dynamics of the cities in which these place-based projects are undertaken. This requires not only looking at the built form of sites but at the capital, stories and ideologies which underpin and shape them. I argue that a relational approach to place in Toronto entails awareness of a dialectical relationship between placemaking and displacement. I describe this dialectic in detail in Chapter Four.

Caveats

It is important to delineate what this thesis is not. Scholars have critically analysed the premise that "creative placemaking' attracts capital, for whom and to what end.[108] This dissertation does not aim to contribute to these important efforts. Nor is this thesis an exploration of the potential or perils of creative placemaking insofar as this term represents the development of new physical infrastructures. *Artscape*, an organization in Toronto that develops live-work spaces for artists, refers to its initiatives as creative placemaking. *Project Row Houses*, a long-time community art project in Houston, Texas, has involved the transformation of old row houses into community galleries and cultural hubs.[109] These shared attempts to build new infrastructure can no doubt result in unique forms of social engagement themselves. The artistic projects I look at here, however, are attempts to shift the imagery and narratives associated with specific places. They are attempts to remake place discursively, to alter social practices of and in place and to alter relationships between people who live or work in

close proximity to each other. I am interested in how social engagement and place are both framed and practiced in these initiatives.

It is also important to make clear that I am not looking at digital contestations of place or at digital placemaking. While the relationship between the digital realm and assertions of right to public spaces, neighbourhoods and cities is clearly very powerful (witness the connections between online solidarity and street demonstrations after Michael Brown, a young black man was killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri, for example), the projects I am looking at here are, for the most part, premised on embodied encounters and are situated in the physical infrastructure of the city. Part of my own project in DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY is to develop an online archive of lost or struggling public services in Toronto, but the project still relies heavily on face-to-face dialogue and on interventions in the streets.

It also crucial to point out that this is an exploration of the relationship between site-specificity and social engagement *in Toronto*. While one of my case studies, *REPOhistory*, was New York-based and worked through the 1990s, I am interested in this collective insofar as their experience can illuminate the potential and perils of site-specific work today in Toronto. Toronto has much in common with other North American global cities, in that it is a site that is transnational and postcolonial, and is experiencing continued spatial polarization of wealth.[110] It is considered a global city[111] and can also, like many other cities, be broadly characterized as city that has been shaped by neoliberal agendas and processes.[112] My research is relevant, then, to social practice elsewhere. This

said, direct parallels between the socio-political contours of Toronto and other global cities cannot be drawn. Nor can I pretend to address the complexities of place-based engagement in rustbelt cities like Detroit or Windsor where placemaking via community gardens and other participatory cultural activities is also on the rise.[113] I believe that many of the criteria in this thesis are relevant to work in those cities but the specific dialectic of placemaking and displacement that I elaborate here is particular to large cities through which global capital and people flow, producing uneven geographies.

Given that I have written this thesis as a PhD candidate in a Faculty of Environmental Studies, it is also crucial to acknowledge that both my case studies themselves and the theoretical lenses through which I analyze them emphasize the human dynamics of place, at the expense of any consideration of natural ecologies and non-human actors. While the human relations and the social dynamics of place have consciously been the purview of my research, it is important to note this omission from the onset. Massey's theoretical work on place (which I draw upon heavily) has been critiqued for neglecting to consider ecological boundaries between places in its drive to broaden spatial imagination. Dirlik argues that Massey's emphasis on the social construction of place is overly zealous, in that it disassociates place from 'fixed location[s]' altogether.[114] And, certainly, there are many contemporary socially engaged art practices that explore the natural ecologies of place or relations between humans and non-humans. Close examination of these practices and deeper consideration of the concept of place vis-à-vis such examination would be a worthy future endeavour.

My case studies, however, are very much focused on relationships, dialogue and power dynamics between people – on the socio-political dynamics of place.

Finally, I want to emphasize that I am examining the *potential* and *challenges* of social engagement via site-specific art rather than measurable outcomes. Art's social outcomes cannot be measured; to believe that they could be would be to reduce art to the most utilitarian function possible. These are long-term processes with many nuanced effects. They are cultural contributions to the public sphere, to the realm of ideas and narrative. They are about symbolism as much as they are about direct social change. They are, perhaps, new forms of 'doing' politics. They certainly represent non-conventional approaches to civic dialogue. While there is no doubt that these practices contribute to new social relationships we can in fact only read them as narratives and practices, deriving hints of how they actually alter social relationships and contribute to material change. While this is a challenge, it is what I set out to do. I reflect further on the relationship between art and social change, and on the ways in which each of these projects approaches this relationship, in my concluding chapter.

Some Notes on Terminology

In this introduction I have slid between the words "place", "site", "locality" and "the local". I have talked about "spatial" imaginations, "spatial" politics and "spatial" practices. I have also slid between the terms "social engagement", participatory, collaborative and co-authored. This brings me to the difficult question of

terminology. Below I elaborate on the difficulty of terminology in this study and the choices I've made.

Place, Space, Site, Locality and 'The Local'

It can be argued that the differences between the words "place", "space", "site", "locality" and "the local" are semantic. In popular discourse they are often used indiscriminately and this is a source of confusion when analysing the practices of artists who may not give much thought to which term of these terms they apply in descriptions of their own work. This said, the term chosen often provides a clue as to how an art practice is situated art-historically and politically.[115] In the discourse of community based-art for example, one is much more likely to encounter the words "place" or "local" than "site-specificity." The use of these words in this lineage of social practice indicates a commitment to long-term engagement with sites, an interest in their narrative dimensions and attention to what makes them different from other sites (their particularity). Community art practice is often defined in opposition to a parachuted-in approach to site-specificity ("plop art"). In geographical literature, choices between the word "space" and "place" often indicate a choosing of sides between Marxist and other critical analyses of power (*spatial* configurations) and phenomenological explorations (of *place*). And in the field of contemporary art, as Miwon Kwon makes clear, the shift in understanding of site "from a fixed, physical location to somewhere or something constituted through social, economic, cultural and political processes"[116] has been accompanied by a congruent shift from use of

the term "site" to "community" (a term which deserves considerable unpacking as well). The different ways in which place, space, site and locality can be taken up in urban socially engaged art is precisely the object of my study here. The key then, is not so much to choose one of these terms but to interrogate how they are employed in any given art practice and the discourse that surrounds it. In my chapter on REPOhistory, for example, I articulate a difference between site-specific art that treats the city as a place through which to engage urban politics and site-specific art that takes up a politics of place.

In the meantime, as a starting point, it seems useful to point out that place, space and the local are all "slippery" terms with multiple connotations.[117] To begin with, the size of the unit represented when one uses any of these terms is unclear. The artistic practices I look at here deepen a sense of place at a range of socially constructed scales, including that of the global, nation-state, region, city and/or neighbourhood. Oftentimes they challenge multiple scales at once, recasting the history of a neighbourhood, for example, and simultaneously challenging a national mythology. Alternatively, sometimes these practices engage with place at the level of the hyperlocal (by exploring a singular park or building, for example).

It also is important to note the common slippage between the terms space and place, despite the clues we may derive from a theorist's choice of words. While space has often been understood as universal, in juxtaposition to the particularities of place,[118] this is a binary that (as I explain in Chapter Four) Doreen Massey explicitly argues against. The terms space and place are used in

different ways in the (increasingly interdisciplinary) fields of geography, anthropology and environmental studies, and no one distinction between space and place exists.[119]

While the variations between how place, space and locality are employed by artists is a primary concern in this research it can safely be said that all of the projects I look at begin with an understanding of place or the local as at least partially socially constructed and certainly as resonant with cultural meanings. As I have noted, for the most part, they emphasize the social contours of urban places rather than their ecological dynamics. Beyond this, these projects vary in their approach to space, place, locality or the local, and these variations are part of the focus of my study.

Social Engagement, Participation and Collaboration

There is also a terminology problem in contemporary art literature on social practice. The trend towards co-authored art practices has been referred to as dialogical art,[120] social practice, socially engaged art, community-based or community-engaged art and, sometimes, "relational aesthetics."[121] The terms "social engagement", "participation", collaboration, "co-authorship" and "community-engagement" are all in currency in contemporary art literature and are, at times, used indiscriminately. Some scholars have made arguments for their choice amongst these terms, indicating their ideological stance in doing so. Art historian Claire Bishop, one of the best known scholars in this field prefers the term "participatory" to "socially engaged" because, as she puts it, "what artist *isn't*

socially engaged?"[122] Bishop defines contemporary social practice as art in which:

> the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*.[123]

Bishop notes that these contours of participatory art are more ideas than realities and, in fact, goes on to argue that some of the most interesting participatory art in recent years have actually been tightly constructed by an individual artist or a pair of artists.[124] While her argument challenges the binaries of passive spectatorship/active authorship (to do so is one of Bishop's key objectives)[125] it also serves as a reminder that "participation" can be forced, coerced and/or tokenistic. Participation unto itself cannot be equated with democracy, though there is an assumed relationship between the two in social practice today.[126] Challenging simplistic notions of participation that obfuscate how power circulates both contextually and within the micropolitics of any given project is part of my project here.

Curator Pablo Helguera prefers the term "socially engaged art" to "social practice", as this situates art projects historically while "social practice" obfuscates the category of art altogether.[127] Art historian Grant Kester points out that the terms "collaboration" and "collaborators" can refer to highly authored creations by pairs of artists and therefore do not per se suggest openness to an open-ended group process of meaning-making, though he chooses to use these

terms.[128] Nato Thompson, curator of *Creative Time*, uses the term "social practice" and writes about social practice as "living as form". He delineates contemporary social practice as anti-representational (action-based), participatory, "situated in the real-world" and engaged with the political sphere.[129] Thompson's definition perhaps reveals more about his own desire for politicized work than the actual trends in social practice today. There are many examples of contemporary social practice that obfuscate politics in favour of what some long-term socially engaged artists consider shallow forms of participation. This has led to significant scepticism about the current popularity of participatory practices. Nonetheless, Thompson and *Creative Time* have compiled an impressive anthology of contemporary practices that are explicitly politicized.[130]

At this point, suffice it to say that, as is the case for "space" and "place", any of these terms can be used to describe the very same project, though they do often indicate a particular ideological stance and/or art-historical lineage. When looking at any artistic practice we should both look to the choice of descriptive terms (as a possible indicator of ideological stance) and go beyond the implied meanings of the term to examine how they are practiced. I prefer to use the term "social engagement" over "participation" or "collaboration" here because it serves as a reminder that collective engagement with social conditions is a key goal in each of the projects I examine. These are not projects, for example, which herald participation in order to produce a purely spectacular and symbolic mass of bodies (one might think of artist Francis Alys' work in distinction to this). As I do with place, however, I take up social engagement as a

"problem-idea."[131] How is social engagement conceptualized in each of these projects? How is it practiced? Can engagement in these projects challenge urban inequities and foster new social relations? How does the choice to work site-specifically impact each project's approach to engagement and vice versa?

Public and Community

Just as choices between the words "space" and "place" often indicate an ideological perspective, so too do choices between the terms "public" and "community". "Public" often indicates a preferred distance between an artist and the people s/he works with, while "community" can indicate proximity. In fact, as Miwon Kwon has shown, there has been significant slippage between the terms "community" and "place" or "site" in community-arts discourse[132] and in popular discourse at large. She details the shift in emphasis in site-specific practice: "Instead of addressing the physical conditions of the site, the focus now is on engaging the concerns of 'those who occupy a given site'… The dialogue is now to occur between an artist and a community or audience group."[133] Kwon goes on to argue (through close analysis of the 1993 exhibition *Culture in Action*) that the movement toward "community" and away from "site" has been premised on a critique of site-specificity as "the imposition of a kind of disembodied museum zone onto what already has been very meaningful and present before that, which was the place."[134] In this discourse both place and community come to signify intimacy and particularity. The term "community" come to imply a *place of participation*, an already-engaged place in which residents have shared

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identities, experiences or aspirations. Thus an implicit equation is made between geographical location and commonality. Kwon goes on to critique the implications of thinking of site as community, arguing that this represents a search for (falsely) reassuring unity.[135]

In keeping with Kwon, my interest is not per se in making an argument for use of the term "public" over "community" or "space" over "place" but in remaining aware of the meanings implied by their application and analyzing how they are taken up in socially engaged artistic practices. How does a search for commonality alter the approach to site-specificity? How can socially engaged artists focus on place while avoiding assumptions of community?

Chapters

The structure of this dissertation is in keeping with my praxis-based approach to research, which I discuss in Chapter Two, **Research Motives and Methodology.** Chapter Two elaborates on how my own history and experiences have shaped my view of Toronto as a place, inspiring both my work in the field of socially engaged art and this doctoral research. Drawing on some details of my own trajectory in the field, I illuminate how my research questions for this study emerged. I also argue for a rigorous praxis-based research methodology and explain why I chose to focus on the projects I did in light of my methodology. Chapter Two ends with a review of the methods I employed to research each of the projects I look at in this dissertation.

Rather than begin my analysis by proposing theoretical lenses through which to examine a set of case studies, I devote Chapter Three, **Politics in the City: REPOhistory as a Genealogy of Site-specific Socially Engaged Art**, to close analysis of the REPOhistory collective's work through the 1990s. This chapter not only illuminates some fundamental challenges of site-specific social engagement but also serves as a genealogy of key approaches to site-specificity in socially engaged art. REPOhistory functioned as a collective, working primarily by consensus. Because of this we can see competing notions of audience, engagement and place in their various projects. My analysis of the artmaking processes of REPOhistory, the site-specific signs they produced and, public responses to their work, illustrates the different ways in which the relationship between place and engagement can be taken up in urban contexts and begs further critical questions.

Chapter Four, **The Challenges of Place-based Engagement: Critical Lenses for Analysis**, follows up on the questions raised in my analysis of REPOhistory, and offers theoretical lenses that can aid in examining contemporary site-specific social engagement in Toronto. Drawing on critical scholars of place, particularly feminist geographer Doreen Massey, I make an argument for a broad spatial imagination and relational approach to place in site-specific work. I then argue that a relational approach to place in Toronto begs careful consideration of the specific dialectics of placemaking/displacement in this city (many of which are at work in other global cities as well). Finally, I turn to questions of difference and dissent with regard to social engagement, offering

feminist political philosopher Bonnie Honig's concept of dilemmatic space as a new lens through which to think about engagement.

In Chapters Five and Six I apply the criteria I developed in Chapter Four to Bridge of One Hair and DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY. Chapter Five, **Out of Place: Jumblies Theatre's Bridge of One Hair**, argues that Jumblies' mandate to include everyone in their community art practice, combined with the dynamics of the west Toronto neighbourhood the project was based in, led the company to adopt a broad spatial imagination, even as they focused on the local. Bridge of One Hair became as much about stories from "elsewhere" as it was about "local" stories and challenged dismissive local constructions of place. Whether the radical challenges to spatial imagination that the project embodied translated from the artistic process to the final performance and from the neighbourhood scale to the "world stage" is another matter, I argue. It is possible that the final production of Bridge of One Hair reified national constructions as much as it challenged local ones. Finally, I consider how Jumblies' approach to social engagement in Bridge of One Hair can inform future socially engaged art. What does it mean to premise social engagement on a mandate to include everyone? While analysis of this project shows that to engage fully with place in the contemporary city entails acknowledging its unboundedness, it may also show that inclusion is an inadequate lens through which to approach social engagement in light of contemporary urban dynamics.

In my final chapter, **Working Place: The *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY***, I discuss my own ongoing collaborative project with visual artist Elinor

Whidden. *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* began as a response to contentious urban politics, specifically municipal budget cuts. I discuss our reasons for working site-specifically in light of this focus and the ways in which our decision to work site-specifically has deepened our engagement with various publics. In this project, place becomes a vehicle through which to foster both empathy across different social locations and acknowledgment of individual subject positions. Working site-specifically allows us as artists to make connections between the deeply personal and a broader political context. I also discuss the challenges of working site-specifically in *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY*. In light of my elaboration on relational specificity in Toronto in Chapter Four, I argue that current urban disparities make it necessary to engage with place at a pan-city level, rather than focusing only on a specific neighbourhood or site, and I identify the challenges this entails. Finally, I discuss how site-specificity in this project has necessitated complex thinking about social engagement and pressured Whidden and me to take sides in existing social antagonisms. This project, I argue, is both about fostering solidarities and about confronting social conflict, reaffirming a need for a nuanced understanding of "social engagement."

Chapter Two - Research Motives and Methodology

Placing Myself: My Research Motives and Artistic Practice

This research has grown out of multiple intersecting personal interests. It has been indirectly motivated by a desire to better understand the city in which I grew up and live today, Toronto: its Aboriginal history, too rarely acknowledged; its relationships to other places; its many different social histories; how past conflicts and social movements have shaped its contemporary political and social dynamics. As a middle-class white settler born and raised in downtown Toronto my experience in this city has been one of economic and cultural privilege. On my maternal grandmothers' side, I am a fourth-generation Torontonian. People on that side of my family were members of the city's early Anglo establishment, the elite of old Toronto. They were captains of industry, property owners, people with connections to political and cultural power. My family history also includes outsider experiences in Toronto, including more recent immigration experiences, anti-Semitism and, political persecution, including internment of relatives, the threat of which forced my maternal grandfather into hiding during the 1940s. In combination, this heritage has produced in me both a sense of responsibility to challenge hegemonic constructions of the city's history (and of national history, more broadly) and an awareness of the incredible fault lines in Toronto's history as currently presented within the educational system, by the City's museums and in City of Toronto branding.

I am also profoundly aware of current inequities in this city. Toronto is not as ghettoized as many American cities but wealth and poverty are increasingly spatially polarized in this city.[136] Also, here next-door neighbours can and do have radically different senses of place depending on their relative privilege or poverty, skin colour, educational background and gender. To my mind, "place" and "community" in this city aren't remotely synonymous. Strong local networks (i.e. local communities) rarely straddle class differences. I've too often witnessed active placemaking activities by local "community" groups that involve the displacement of people they deem undesirable. While we could benefit socially from strengthened social relationships at a local level and while I personally feel the "lure of the local" (a desire to better know the people I share a neighbourhood and a city with) each example of locality I have known is marked by acute displacements.

My awareness of Toronto as a city of displacement has become significantly more profound as I have worked over the years as an activist, artist and educator, with street-involved Toronto residents, racialized youth, and marginalized social institutions. Over fifteen years of work in documentary history, activist art and community art have led me to the questions I engage in this research and have taught me as much about the complexities of place and social engagement as all of the reading I have done on the subject. Over the years, I have worked on a number of projects that attempted to foster civic dialogue through the prism of place. This began when I worked as a researcher for *Canada: A People's History*, a CBC television documentary series, which

narrated Canadian history through first-person testimonies. After two years of work with the CBC, I moved into freelance work and at the same time co-founded an activist arts collective, Paperfire, which aimed to personalize the (often impersonal) messages of Toronto's anti-corporate globalization movement of that time. Paperfire built giant puppets and other spectacle arts and staged numerous public performances in Toronto between 2002-2004. It was through my work with Paperfire that I was introduced to the field of community art. My work in community art since that time (creating performances, video and audio installations and, most recently, public plaques) has most directly prompted this doctoral research. Let me outline a few of my experiences, to give some examples.

In 2005 I co-wrote and co-produced a performance piece with called *Stories From the Badlands* with artists Leah Houston and Cat McLeod. *Stories From the Badlands* examined tensions regarding public safety, crime and poverty in the Bloor/Lansdowne area of Toronto (near which all of us lived). Disturbed by attempts by a local group to 'clean up the neighbourhood', our goal was to illuminate the ways in which discourses of safety and community can further exclude marginalized populations. Using direct quotes gathered both from interviews with street-involved residents and from the online discussions of neighbourhood "improvement" groups, we wrote a multi-perspectival choral script, which we performed in front of projections of photographic images of the neighbourhood. The following year Leah Houston continued the work we had begun through a community art project with residents of Savards Women's

Shelter at the corner of Bloor/Lansdowne. I produced a short video with shelter residents for that project.

Houston then invited me to co-lead an eight-month community art project with her. *We Are Here: The Monument Project* (Toronto, 2008) was an installation project produced collaboratively with residents of two Toronto homeless shelters (Savards and Strachan House). Leah and I acted as artists in residence in the shelters and spent multiple days a week working on the project in situ for the first months of the project and then every day for the last two months. The work we made with shelter residents consisted of four connected installations. One memorialized homeless people who have died on the streets of Toronto through handmade shrines. Another celebrated the vibrancy and presence of people who are currently living on the street and in the shelter system through "life chairs", a visual form Leah had worked with the year before. The third consisted of poetry and photographs created by shelter residents with our help. The fourth was an audio installation that I made, based on recordings I did with shelter residents on themes of home, safety, policing and community and, again, based as well on voices from homeowner-led neighbourhood groups. This installation, titled *Community Meeting*, brought clashing visions of home and neighbourhood together. In our program, I described the installation in this way:

> This is a community meeting with a twist. In it we hear things which often go unsaid when housing is discussed publicly. Here, the voices of people who have lived on the street and in the shelter system, so often ignored when community and neighbourhood are publicly discussed, take center stage, casting a new light on the safety discourse put forth by homeowners.[137]

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As the lead artist I saw myself as the convener of the meeting, which would likely erupt were these voices to be heard simultaneously in a real public meeting.

My work on *Stories from the Badlands* and *We Are Here: The Monument Project,* and the process of making *Community Meeting* in particular, allowed me to explore the contested nature of urban places and to play with the presentation of directly conflicting emotional relationships to place. For both projects I had to think very carefully about audience reception and to confront head-on the myth that any piece of "public art" can speak equally to all publics. In these projects I was also struggling to find ways to work collaboratively on contentious social issues, issues in which power must be named directly. I was struggling with making work that was antagonistic, in that it challenged securely housed people to question their own assumptions and revealed the bigotry of a well-intentioned middle-class citizen's group, without turning audience members off. This was an excellent exposure to the challenges of site-specific social engagement.

Another project that contributed to the development of the ideas presented in this dissertation was *Oy Di Velt Vern Yinger* (Jumblies Theatre, 2008, 2009). *Oy Di Velt Vern Yinger* was a community-based performance about the history of Naivelt, an eighty year-old secular socialist Jewish community on the outskirts of Brampton (near Toronto). It was produced twice, once in the summer of 2008 on site at Naivelt, and again in May 2009 at the Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre for the *Mayworks Festival of the Working Arts*. I did research and gathered oral history for both productions and was also the lead installation

designer, working collaboratively with Leah Houston, Michael Burtt, Michaela Otto and dozens of Naivelters, past and present.

Naivelt's history is controversial, as it has always been an enclave of radical counter-culture and a hotbed of debate. Many of its members were historically persecuted for their political (primarily communist) allegiances. The community is also culturally steeped in internal disagreement and debate, public denunciations and critical conversations (some organized, many impromptu). It is a place to which community members are deeply attached, a second home for many. A number of current Naivelters have multi-generational relationships with the site and the community, and are proud of the roles their parents or grandparents played in shaping Naivelt. The experience of gathering and critically presenting a history of Naivelt was, then, bound to be a challenge. This experience was made all the more complicated and interesting for me personally because of my own family's relationship to Naivelt. My grandparents were members of the Naivelt community and my mother spent her summers there as a child. Along with a number of other communist party members, however, my family cut off ties with the Naivelt community in the mid-fifties, after Khrushchev exposed the atrocities of Stalin's regime. The mid to late fifties were a rocky time at Naivelt, as community members were divided over whether to remain communists or denounce communism. This time is referred to at Naivelt as "the split."

Working on *Oy Di Velt Vern Yinger* gave me firsthand experience of the omission of critical perspectives which can occur in any community-based site-

specific project, even one undertaken by a community that is, in many respects, keenly aware of historical omissions and hegemonic constructions. I found my family's experience pushed to the sidelines and was shocked by the vehemence with which contemporary Naivelters responded to the story of "the split." The dominant narrative that Naivelt has developed about itself tends to omit the rifts of the past, the contradictions and political/ethical dilemmas that members of the community faced in the forties, fifties and sixties. In collaboration with Jumblies Theatre's artistic director Ruth Howard and with Leah Houston, I had a chance to respond artistically to this in the 2009 production of the show, where we set up an "Interactive Room" which included a "debate table". At the debate table, anyone could join in carefully facilitated but heated discussions about the very issues that plague the community to this day: Should Naivelters have left in the fifties? What is wrong with communism? Were those who left traitors? Which ideals remain to this day and which should be rethought? This was an excellent opportunity to try out another artistic method of working with conflicting perspectives about a community.

Stories From the Badlands, We Are Here: The Monument Project and Oy Di Velt Vet Vern Yinger are examples of work in the field of socially engaged art that has led directly to the research questions this dissertation explores. Jumblies Theatre's Bridge of One Hair, which I began work on as a student researcher/video documenter for the VIVA Project in 2005, is another example. It led me to so many questions about the meaning of place in a postcolonial and transnational city like Toronto that I have written an entire chapter of this

dissertation on the project. Two and a half years of continued work on the project also immeasurably deepened and challenged my perspectives on ethical artistic collaboration, the meaning of community and the challenges of critical storytelling.

Finally, ongoing work on my own project DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY (2011-) has continued to prompt further questions about site-specific social engagement. I have also written an entire chapter of this dissertation on this project. It has brought the challenges of working critically through site-specificity to the fore, as this project is underway at what many perceive to be a time of crisis in Toronto. The project responds directly to contentious contemporary conditions.

The primary motivation for this research, then, has been to examine how the field that I have ended up working in, socially engaged art, can challenge urban inequities and foster democratic social change. My experiences working in this field have shown me new layers of city life, introduced me to stories and experiences I would never otherwise have encountered. They are perhaps the only situations I've experienced in which communities of place really do begin to look inclusive, despite the continued exclusions which I discuss in my in-depth analyses of these projects. Imperfect as they are, these practices represent attempts at real dialogue across difference- dialogue that engages difference rather than shoving it out of the picture. The hunch that these practices hold hope for better forms of placemaking and community-building has spurred this research. I am interested in both the potential of this kind of work to foster new

social relations as well as the challenges and tensions that socially engaged artists face in trying to do this through site-specificity.

It is also important to note that over the course of my studies I have observed a kind of zeitgeist with relation to site-specific participatory art practices. These practices are flourishing and proliferating. Site-specific social engagement is a hot concept in the contemporary art world. There is more and more work in this field but what does it amount to? My desire to probe this question critically has driven my research.

Research Methodology: A Praxis-Based Approach

As both a scholar and someone involved in making socially engaged art, I have applied a praxis-based approach to this research. A praxis-based approach asserts that knowledge production is a dialectical process of action and reflection, and that knowledge should be produced with the goal of social transformation. Popular educator Paulo Freire explained praxis in this way:

> We must not negate practice for the sake of theory. To do so would reduce theory to a pure verbalism or intellectualism. By the same token, to negate theory for the sake of practice…is to run the risk of losing oneself in the disconnectedness of practice. It is for this reason that I never advocate either a theoretic elitism or a practice ungrounded in theory, but the unity between theory and practice.[138]

I have conducted this research in the hopes that I may continue to contribute to creative placemaking in the city of Toronto, where I live. While my research has involved literature reviews, interviews with other artists, and archival work, my knowledge of this field is also grounded in my own practice and I write about this

work from a position of ever-increasing familiarity with the complexities and challenges of practice in this field. In taking up a praxis-based approach I follow in the footsteps of Participatory Action Researchers, who are committed to research in order to further action towards social justice.[139] I will elaborate on my epistemological perspective shortly.

I see my position as a scholar/practitioner as a strength in this research. Too often academic analyses of activist and/or community-based practices either reify such practices or critique them without adequate attention to the extraordinarily challenging contexts in which they are undertaken. It is my hope that my research avoids both of these pitfalls. Socially engaged artists are always working within the constraints and possibilities of a specific social, cultural, political and economic context. None of the practices I discuss in this dissertation are by any means perfect and I have undertaken analysis partially in order to consider ways in which they might be improved upon. But neither should any of them be dismissed altogether in light of their pitfalls, blindspots or shortcomings. They can be mined instead for critical insights, which might lead to better choices on the part of future practitioners.

My position as a scholar/practitioner is also a strength because documentation of process-based art rarely does justice to its breadth or depth. Claire Bishop notes that participatory practices are ideally experienced live and over a long period of time.[140] She goes on to point out that in-depth research on participatory art is scant because few critics or scholars can spend the requisite time immersing themselves in participatory projects. I have had the privilege of

immersing myself in two of the three projects I analyze here and this allows me to better address the entirety of the artistic methodology of each of them.

The artistic practices I discuss here illuminate a range of conceptual starting points. Their approaches to participation and to place are different in many respects. Examined comparatively their methodological differences are highlighted. My comparison of these methodologies has not been undertaken in the search for a 'right way' of working. A formulaic approach to site-specific art is an oxymoron. Each of these projects has been undertaken in distinct circumstances and the artists involved have carefully considered those circumstances when designing their projects. Nonetheless, an analysis of different methodologies is instructive. It reveals a range of paradigms from which to proceed with site-specific engagement, identifies key lenses through which such practices can be considered, and fosters critical thinking about future practices.

I elaborate below on my praxis-based methodology and my position as a scholar/practitioner. Specifically, I discuss: my choice of case studies; my ideological/epistemological stance; and, the methods I have employed to research each of my case studies.

Choice of Case Studies

My interest in approaching this research from the dual perspective of scholar/practitioner has deeply influenced my choice of case studies. In the belief

that scholarly analysis is greatly enriched by a nuanced awareness of the context and daily dynamics of a practice, I have chosen to focus on projects in which I have either participated for a considerable length of time or for which I had access to information that revealed the workings behind the practice over a period of years. Here I elaborate on my familiarity with each of my case studies.

REPOhistory

REPOhistory is an art collective I have been interested in for many years but it was only when I discovered that the collective had archived all of their meeting minutes, correspondences and notes that I considered including *REPOhistory* as a case study in this research. Typically, researching process-based art practices after the fact proves problematic, as few physical traces of these practices remain, and even fewer are available to the public. These practices are usually under-documented due to short-term funding (or lack of funding altogether) and scant attention on the part of mainstream press and art critics. Sources that do remain, such as grant reports, interviews with artists or follow-up presentations by those involved, also neglect to tell the whole story of such practices, as artists feel pressure to emphasize the "successes" of the work and to maintain existing relationships with project partners and funders by passing over difficulties like assumptions gone wrong, fallouts, contentious relationships, breakdowns etcetera. To critically document underfunded process-based art practices necessitates either the luxury of time, an intimate and trusted circle of colleagues with whom to reflect, or extraordinary commitment to democratic practice. The latter was perhaps the biggest factor in REPOhistory's case. As I discuss in my

chapter on REPOhistory (Chapter Three), this collective went to great efforts to work democratically, using a consensus-based decision making model, and documenting their process consistently (though, as I will discuss in the chapter, there are gaps in the documentation).

Looking through REPOhistory's archive, then, presented a rare opportunity to closely analyze the practices of an influential group of critical socially engaged artists: to enter into their discussions and dilemmas, and to learn about the challenges of their practice behind the scenes. While written documents obviously only hint at the depth of these dilemmas (no doubt there were tensions that did not make it into the meeting minutes for the sake of group cohesion), the archive reveals at least some of the conceptual and practical challenges REPOhistory faced and, taken together with the artistic work produced by the collective as well as media coverage of their work, interviews conducted with leading members (undertaken by other researchers) and the critical writings of some of those members themselves, allows an in-depth story of REPOhistory's site-specific work to emerge.

Bridge of One Hair
Bridge of One Hair was an obvious choice for me, as I was involved in this project as a researcher for the VIVA project, and then as an associate artist, for over two and a half years. I logged countless hours on the project, and came to know the personalities of lead artists as well as many participants well. I witnessed power struggles and observed the rise and fall of various ideas and

artistic influences (some made it to the final show and others were abandoned along the way). I experienced the "creative tensions" of the work[141] firsthand, both as leaders of the project grappled with them and as I struggled with them myself. Obviously, as in any qualitative research, my analysis of this project has been thoroughly shaped by my own positionality, both in relation to race, class and gender and in relation to my specific relationships, roles and responsibilities on the project. Nonetheless, it seemed clear to me that conducting a case study on this project in the most self-reflexive way possible, would produce a far richer analysis than one based on more arms-length research.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY

Finally, writing a case study on my own project, *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* has allowed me to reflect on a site-specific participatory project right through from initial conception to mid-process. Looking at my own project mid-process has allowed for true praxis, a privileged step back from the practice to examine it analytically before jumping back into the fray. Clearly, analysis of one's own project calls for a commitment to self-reflexivity and there is no question of my "biased" position in relation to this project. But writing about one's work outside of seeking project funding or other forms of approval is an opportunity to delve into critical questions and insights one arrives at during the work but might otherwise neglect. Taking the time to reflect critically allows for discussions that might otherwise be put away for the sake of expediency or promotion. I am also privileged to have an insightful and experienced co-lead artist on this project, Elinor Whidden, whose voice has helped to keep my own

perspectives in check and whose questions and concerns have influenced my own.

Summary of Choice of Case Studies

Taken together, my choice of case studies represents a spiraling-in of scholarly intimacy, from the half-knowledge that review of written documents brings, to the experience of a participatory researcher and associate artist, to the perspective of a lead artist reflecting on her own project. I appreciate these different vantage points. I am also pleased that these case studies represent a range of political perspectives and artistic approaches. Each of these case studies is premised on significantly different approaches to place and social engagement.

I do want to note, though, that my choice to privilege access to case studies rather than careful choices of themes, artistic approaches or social contexts, means that future research will be necessary. I was sorry, for example, not to undertake research on First Nations-led practices in this field, as First Nations' relationships to place have been amongst the most violently *displaced*, and there are very exciting contemporary First Nations reclamations of urban places and site-specific dialogues underway. I believe that research on these practices would greatly enrich theories of place and social engagement in the city and hope to undertake such research in the future. As I have already noted in my Introduction, I am also sorry not to have looked at any projects that bring together an understanding of site as socially constructed and awareness of the ecological contours of urban sites. Finally, in the future, I would also like to look closely at

work taken up by the UNESCO Sites of Conscience Network. This network has carefully developed a pedagogical approach to place-based memory, animating specific sites (some urban, some rural) in order to foster dialogue about past and present injustices. It would be interesting to put their work in conversation with that of artists grappling with similar content and themes.

Ideological and Epistemological Perspective

This study is clearly situated within the realm of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research as:

> a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible…Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.[142]

Within the realm of qualitative research, my epistemological position is clearly postpositivist in that I begin with the assumption that knowledge (and therefore research) is always value-laden, partial, situated and subjective.[143] As Denzin and Lincoln emphasize, however, even postpostivist research is marked by contestations, dilemmas and unresolved problems. If the researcher is always limited by his/her social location what does it mean to lay claim to a set of research results? If knowledge is always partial how can one claim a perspective on questions of social justice and act confidently from that perspective? What constitutes rigorous qualitative research? These questions have provoked countless debates and qualitative researchers have had to examine and defend

their ideas concerning agency, experience, subjectivity, truth and power. Postpositivist qualitative researchers work from a range of theoretical paradigms.[144]

My epistemological perspective does not fall into one postpositivist camp. Rather, I am influenced by a combination of critical/transformative research methodologies, feminist theory and postmodern approaches to research. From critical/transformative methodologies (specifically Participatory Action Research), I take the perspective that research should be undertaken in order to inform future action, and that knowing and acting are dialectical processes.[145] Critical/transformative researchers have also emphasized the value of analysis grounded in historical context, arguing for research that is localized but situated in the context of globalizing processes.[146] This emphasis is also strong in feminist theory, particularly transnational feminist theory.[147] Feminist theory has influenced my conceptions of both power and identity, which I understand as intersectional and shaped by socially constructed factors (gender, race, class and other structural categories) but also fluid, relational, and played out in day-to-day practices and systems.[148] Postmodern theory informs my work in that I reject singular or foundational truth claims and view all knowledge as partial. Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha argues that an anti-oppressive approach to research is both critical (in that it seeks to contest material power and hegemonic frames) and difference-centred, in that it considers the intersectionality of identity and understands truth claims as always situated.[149] Moosa-Mitha traces the roots of critical theory back to some forms of liberal theory, Marxist theory (including the

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work of both Althusser and Gramsci, who expanded Marxist thinking to include the cultural realm and brought the concept of hegemony to analyses of processes of social change) and "white feminism" (also known as 1st wave feminism).[150] Antecedents for difference-centered approaches, Moosa-Mitha argues have been informed by feminist theory (particularly the interventions of feminists of colour into white feminist thinking) and postmodern theory. All of these historical lineages can be seen in my approach and, like Moosa-Mitha, I argue for an approach that is both critical and "difference-centred."[151]

That my ideology and epistemology are informed by a combination of critical/transformative methodologies, feminist theory and, postmodern theory is evident both in the questions my research engages, and in the methods I have employed to undertake this research. It is also evident in the very content of my research. At its core this study on site-specific socially engaged art practices is an investigation of non-authoritarian forms of transformative practice. I am most interested in artistic practices that frame truth(s) as partial, situated and value-laden yet work from this perspective to challenge social injustice and power imbalances (a transformative approach). I am drawn to artistic practices that seek to challenge hegemonic frames by exposing them as socially constructed rather than inevitable.

Some researchers have juxtaposed transformative research and postmodern research, arguing that transformative approaches traditionally begin with a set politic; a foundational idea of justice and a vanguardist approach to social change.[152] I understand the two, however, as not only compatible but

vitally connected. A desire for decentralized and autonomous social change in its

most radical sense requires a shift in worldview from a western positivist belief in

"objective truth" to an epistemology based on multiple truths, common to many

non-western worldviews[153] and pivotal to postmodern theory. Recognizing

difference is not only pivotal to the development of non-oppressive ways of

making social change but is also crucial to the development of radical

approaches to research. Susan Strega writes:

> Researchers must find an epistemological position and methodologies that
> can make sense of differences. Research must locate itself within an
> epistemology of "truths" rather than "Truth" because "Truth" has failed to
> account for racialized epistemologies, women's ways of knowing, and other
> subjugated knowledges.[154]

Strega argues that many critical social scientists, who aim to contribute to social

change through their research, base their research approaches on an untenable

epistemological position which, while it acknowledges truth as a social

construction, still reverts to the idea that the reality of the subject being studied

can be "uncovered."[155] She proposes instead, an approach that views knowledge

as constituted by multiple perspectives and that values previously marginalized

knowledge.[156]

 In keeping with Strega, my understanding is that no qualitative research study

can claim to be more than "the view from here" but that the quality of research

practice (and, likewise, the quality of artistic practices) can be judged. All

researchers are historically and politically situated and read the world through the

cultural paradigms they operate within as well as their identity positions vis à vis

structural power. That said, I do not consider all research results equally valid or rigorous. Precisely because knowledge is partial and situated, responsible research for social transformation must be undertaken self-reflexively with a vigilant eye to power.[157] I also believe that, like work for transformative social change, research is improved by:

1) Grounding in Practice

2) Self-reflexivity

3) Dialogue and collaboration

4) Methods that recognize multiple ways of knowing

5) Constant revision over time

Awareness that all knowledge and ideas are partial and situated does not have to lead to paralysis in the realm of action. It can inform self-reflexive practices for social change, which will continuously have to be tested, analyzed, critiqued and revised.[158] This is the value of a praxis-based approach, which moves back and forth between action and critical reflection. I briefly elaborate here on these five elements of my research methodology.

Grounding in Practice

As I have already stated, I work from the perspective that knowledge and action inform one another. Testing ideas in practice can illuminate contradictions, challenges and new possibilities. Practice can also foster deeper understanding

of the roles that particular social, historical and geographical contexts play in shaping one's actions.

Self-Reflexivity

Lather argues that "to write 'postmodern' is to write paradoxically aware of one's complicity in that which one critiques."[159] According to Lather, the focus in social research has "shifted from "are the data biased?" to "whose interests are served by the bias?"[160] I understand self-reflexivity to involve acknowledgement and awareness of one's social location in relation to systemic power, as well as a practice of constantly questioning one's assumptions. Self-reflexivity, in my understanding, also involves listening for perspectives that challenge one's own views and thinking in dialogue with others.

Dialogue and Collaboration

If knowledge is partial, and socially situated, collaboration and dialogue are necessary both in the development of radical research practices and in the development of transformative practices. Freire discusses dialogue as a way of knowing:

> (D)ialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing.[161]

Dialogue and collaboration become crucial if we recognize that truths are only ever partial and socially constituted. This partiality means that knowledge of the

world that emerges from monologue will always be limited in scope. While I am the only person responsible for this research, my research has involved constant dialogue with other practitioners in this field. Two of my three case studies have involved significantly collaborative practices.

Methods that Recognize Multiple Ways of Knowing

It is widely agreed upon within qualitative research that the use of multiple methods in one study improves the depth of research.[162] In keeping with Audre Lorde's famous assertion that the master's house cannot be dismantled with the master's tools,[163] Strega proposes that critical research requires not only multiple methods but non-traditional methods. In line with this way of thinking, my research contributes to a growing tradition of arts-informed research, research that employs artistic methods to apprehend phenomena.[164]

While each artistic method is individually limited in terms of what it can apprehend or communicate, careful choice of artistic method can expose complexities that would be rendered invisible by traditional academic research methods. Research that is arts-informed has the potential to integrate intellect and emotion,[165] theory and practice, the perceived split between what is personal and individual, and what is social and political. An arts-informed approach to research can also require the researcher to recognize her responsibility to her research on a personal level. Arts-informed researcher Lorrie Neilsen calls this "walking theory": "[T]his way of being and knowing asks a response-abilitiy, invites us to develop all our possibilities- not only the cognitive, but all aspects of our sense-making selves."[166] As the question of what art can and can't 'do' is a

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pivotal concern in this research I will not provide any further generalizations on the subject. It is important to note here, though, that I consider all stages of artistic production (artistic processes, final 'products,' ongoing and evolving responses from multiple perspectives) to be important sites of knowledge production.

Constant Revision over Time

Radical democratic theorist Chantal Mouffe warns of "the danger of postulating that there could be a rational definite solution to the question of justice in a democratic society."[167] In fact, she argues that the very idea of a final destination is antithetical to a socially just democracy:

> Instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics requires bringing them to the fore, making them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation. The fact that this must be envisaged as an unending process should not be cause for despair, because the desire to reach a final destination can only lead to the elimination of the political and to the destruction of democracy.[168]

This is an argument for knowledge, frameworks and solutions to social problems that emerge out of dialogues that aim to bring conflict to the fore, focusing on how the different perspectives expressed are complex and contradictory. A dialogical process of theorizing and making social change will always be a work in progress, emerging out of democratic interaction. It entails challenging hegemonic constructions with the realization that any counter-hegemonic forms that replace them will also be sites of exclusion and therefore of further contestation. A radical democratic approach involves working towards ideals that

can never be envisioned in their entirety and allowing those visions to shift as we

learn from the processes of working to realize them. Marx's statement that we

make history in conditions not of our own "choosing"[169] is apt here, as is a Latin

American popular education saying, which I have taken to heart: "You who are

walking, there is no road. We make the road by walking."[170]

A Note on my use of 'Creative Tensions'

While I have not explicitly named it as such throughout this dissertation, my

broader epistemological stance has been to look for what Deborah Barndt,

drawing on Antonio Gramsci's work, calls "creative tensions" in my field of study.

Barndt writes:

> Gramsci offers a…dialectical way of thinking that challenges positivist,
> linear, and dichotomous ways of framing of issues. He proposes naming
> and engaging contradictions; it is only within the spaces created by
> contradictions of any given moment that we can take action…By naming
> and exploring creative tensions, we acknowledge that they are inherent to
> community arts practices; they are not necessarily to be resolved but rather
> to be acknowledged and engaged.[171]

To my mind, attention to creative tensions brings together the desire to conduct

research in order to contribute to action for social change and an

acknowledgment of the historical specificity and partiality of any given moment or

perspective.

Parallels between my Epistemological Stance and Site-specific Socially Engaged Art

I have clearly adopted a simultaneously critical and postmodern stance in this

research. This stance has played out not only in how I've conducted my research

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but also in my choice to focus on particular artistic practices. I am interested in practices that are difference-centered, weaving together multiple stories and perspectives, but are also politicized, intervening in inequitable social relations. While these practices aim to contribute to social change, they are not premised on a set idea of social justice or the social good but rather view interaction and dialogue as means of furthering social justice.

Research Methods Employed in each Case Study

I employed a variety of research methods in this study, some arts-informed and others more conventional in the field of qualitative research. Below I briefly outline the methods employed in research on each case study.

REPOhistory

My research on REPOhistory involved a combination of primary and secondary research. The bulk of my data was gathered through archival research, during which I reviewed the REPOhistory Archive, located at New York University's Fales Library. The archive consists of meeting minutes, correspondences, notes of individual members, working sketches and ideas for projects, research notes, press clippings and original artworks. During my archival research I looked in particular for REPOhistory's approaches to place and social engagement. I also looked for key "creative tensions" and all moments of dilemma or conflict. Obviously, this archival research gave me numerous clues as to the context in which REPOhistory functioned as well.

I chose not to interview members of REPOhistory after the fact, primarily because they have already been interviewed by a number of researchers and members of the art press (I draw on these interviews). I also made this choice because it has been almost fifteen years since REPOhistory stopped working as a collective. My secondary research included gathering all published literature on REPOhistory, including news reports, art press, interviews, essays and web materials.

Bridge of One Hair

I began my research on *Bridge of One Hair* as a researcher for the *VIVA! Project*. *VIVA!* drew on a Participatory Action Research model, through which artists/educators/participants in each project were involved in developing research questions, implementing the research and analyzing the results. *Bridge of One Hair* was an ambitious project and its lead artists were in actual fact too short on time to give much thought to the VIVA! research. In light of this, I became a key researcher (at the same time as I was a participant/artist on the project). I spent one year working on the project at least weekly (often more) in my official capacity as a VIVA! representative, and a second year working on the project much more intensively as a documenter (sometimes paid, sometimes volunteer) and associate artist. The research methods I used over those two years included: participant observation, interviews, extensive video documentation (along with endless editing of video- a great way to reflect on moments again and again). Participating in the project (co-leading the youth

group one year, training youth in video the next and, contributing to artists meetings and brainstorms) was also an invaluable research method.

Two years after the completion of the project I conducted further interviews with lead artists and project partners. These interviews allowed me to follow up on the key themes I was interested in for the purposes of this research and to test my evolving perspective on the project against the perspectives of others who knew it intimately. I also examined all written documents pertaining to the project at that time, looking again for perspectives on place and social engagement, as well as for creative tensions, faultlines and conflicts. These documents included sketches, correspondences between artists, participant feedback, lead artists' notes and ideas, draft scripts and correspondences with funders and community partners.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY

I did not initially intend to include *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* in this research. I began this project with Elinor Whidden in 2011 in response to pressing and contentious municipal politics in Toronto. The project has evolved so much, however, and been so rich with learning, that it became clear to me later that I should focus on this project. *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* is ongoing but my research approach has been to look back through the hundreds of documents and images Whidden and I have created over the course of this project so far, considering themes of place and engagement. These include notes from dozens of meetings we've had with service staff and community organizers, various write-ups we've done for grants, festivals and partners (which

show different iterations of the project), the large "memory archive" we've made for this project (which is both in hard copy and online), photo and video documentation of our performances and feedback from audience members and project partners on our work.

Though I have only considered it research in retrospect, my research on *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* has also been significantly arts-informed. My reflections in this dissertation emerge from artistic practice, including public performance, work with text and visual art in the context of intensified urban politics in Toronto. Together, Whidden and I have navigated the tensions of producing site-specific dialogue, sometimes intuitively, sometimes analytically. Having lived some of the tensions I examine in this research has made my understanding of them much deeper. Being privy to (and responsible for) every artistic decision has been very different than "going along for the ride" as I did when working on *Bridge of One Hair*.

Inevitably, my perspective has also been shaped by countless informal conversations about the project with community organizers, activists, artists and others. These conversations have helped me to understand the nuances of site-specific social engagement as it relates to this project. One could say, then that dialogue has also been a research method in this case.

Chapter Three - Politics in the City: REPOhistory as a Genealogy of Site-specific Socially Engaged Art

The site-specific signs they made bore questions like: *Who owns history? Whose histories are remembered? Is this history a part of your history?* At times they incited controversy, with the City of New York altogether withdrawing permission to mount one large exhibition on the day it was set to launch, and removing certain signs in response to complaints from business owners and residents. The artists embraced controversy, using it to garner further publicity for their projects and the political issues they raised. Public debate added to the way in which everyday urban sites were "roused from their anonymity by the intervention of these artworks."[172]

This chapter examines the work of REPOhistory, an activist art collective dedicated to artistic animation of critical social histories, most often through site-specific exhibitions in urban public spaces. REPOhistory worked throughout the 1990s, primarily in New York City but also in Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas. The collective disbanded in 2000. REPOhistory became known for its iconic site-specific street signs, which employed striking visual images and text to place marginalized social histories in the public eye. Amongst REPOhistory's best-known projects are *The Lower Manhattan Sign Project* (New York, 1992), *Queer Spaces* (New York, 1993), *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* (Atlanta, 1995), *Civil Disturbances* (New York, 1999-1999) and *Circulation* (2000).

REPOhistory's work has been well documented in art press, journals and anthologies.[173] It has been recognized as an important predecessor for a range of activist and pedagogical art projects. Gregory Sholette, one of *REPOhistory*'s co-founders, has said that "there is nothing terribly original about the idea of *REPOhistory,* its structure is simple and can be applied elsewhere. It's really a DIY (Do It Yourself) approach to public art and to historical research".[174] In light of this statement and the attention the collective has received relative to other activist art projects outside of the gallery system, it may seem strange to devote a chapter of this dissertation to examining REPOhistory. But it is precisely because of REPOhistory's influence on future practices that a close look at their work is important. REPOhistory aimed to spark critical public dialogue and site-specificity was their chosen vehicle through which to do this. Yet, the ways in which REPOhistory took up site-specificity and social engagement have not been examined in depth. Why did REPOhistory choose to work site-specifically? How were particular ideas about audience, participation and the social role of art tied up in their choices around site-specificity? And to what extent did REPOhistory's various approaches to site-specificity impact their ability to instigate critical dialogue? In other words, how did site-specificity foster social engagement, both in the production and reception of REPOhistory's work?

This chapter probes the different iterations of the relationship between site-specificity and social engagement in REPOhistory's various projects. REPOhistory always functioned as a collective, striving to be democratic throughout its research and art-making processes. While similarities between

REPOhistory's projects have been emphasized, in that most of them involved the making of site-specific historical signs,[175] the fact that this group functioned as a collective meant that their work was, in fact, informed by a range of approaches to site and social engagement. Comparison of these varying approaches is instructive. Through this comparison we can see that the relationship between site and engagement can be conceptualized in notably different ways despite an ostensibly common politic. We can also see how relationships between site and engagement play out based on the specificities of different urban contexts.

I focus on the relationship between site and engagement in three of REPOhistory's projects in particular: *The Lower Manhattan Sign Project* (New York, 1992)*, Entering Buttermilk Bottom* (Atlanta, 1995) and *Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City* (New York, 1998-1999)*.* I argue that there is a range of conceptualizations of site and engagement at play both *within* these projects and *between* these projects. In fact, a close look at REPOhistory's work can work as a genealogy of site-specific socially engaged art and raises critical questions regarding both site-specificity and social engagement. This is why I have chosen to place this chapter before the chapter that outlines my theoretical lenses for analysis of site-specific socially engaged art practices. In REPOhistory's practice we can see lineages of counter-monumental practice, new genre public art (also known as community-based art), activist art and, to a lesser extent, site-specific performance. There are important differences between how these artistic genres approach site and social engagement but existing literature does not thoroughly compare these genres in terms of their approach to

these concepts. This chapter on REPOhistory functions as both a close read of a case study and also as a genealogy, a non-linear examination of key ideas and practices in socially engaged site-specific work, undertaken in order to "generate critique."[176] My purpose here is not to argue for one approach to site and engagement over another but to productively analyze the differences between them. I also see this genealogy as a chance to argue against rigid distinctions between genres, which have been too common in literature on socially engaged art. REPOhistory's work blurred the lines between genres and cannot be pinned to any one 'camp'. As I demonstrate, evaluation of any of them according to genre-specific criteria falls short. This makes REPOhistory a useful counterpoint to easy dismissals of any one approach and begs for the development of cross-genre evaluative criteria, ever more necessary as genres of public art continue to blur.[177] I develop such criteria in my next chapter.

I begin this chapter on REPOhistory by providing a short introduction to the collective and briefly situating them art historically. I follow this with in-depth analysis of *The Lower Manhattan Sign Project*, *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* and *Civil Disturbances* as they pertain to site-specificity and social engagement. As a precursor to both of these sections I elaborate on my research methods for this case study of *REPOhistory*.

Research Methods

As discussed in Chapter Two, I researched REPOhistory by conducting my own textual analysis of the group's artworks (both online and in the archives),

reviewing published material on REPOhistory and, going through the collective's

extensive meeting minutes, notes and correspondences, which are stored in the

Fales Archives at New York University. This means that I have an informed but

only ever partial glimpse into REPOhistory's artistic process, artwork and the

public's reception of their work. I did not experience REPOhistory's signs in situ

nor did it seem useful, for the purpose of this study, to go back and interview

members of the collective about the issues I am interested in here, so many

years after the fact. This case study, then, opens up as many questions as it

does answers and represents both the strengths and weaknesses of an outsider

look at collective art-making and public reception after the fact.

Review of REPOhistory's archival documents makes it clear that, while

this group functioned as a consensus-based collective, a few individuals

dedicated extraordinary amounts of time to keeping the work going over the

years and thereby acted as de-facto leaders of the group, though they were not

named as such. The meeting minutes were helpful in illuminating dissenting

perspectives but many of the archival documents, beyond meeting minutes, were

written by a handful of individuals, most notably REPOhistory co-founders

Gregory Sholette and Lisa Maya Knauer and REPOhistory members Mark

O'Brien and Neill Bogan. Sholette has also published a number of essays on

REPOhistory and has acted as a kind of spokesperson for the group after the

fact, speaking on public panels and participating in interviews about the

collective's work.[178] As a result of this my research does rely somewhat heavily

on Sholette's recounting of events at times, though I looked very carefully for

dissenting perspectives throughout my archival research and have checked

Sholette's published remembrances against the archives. Individual memories of

any group process are inevitably biased and I am less interested in any one

REPOhistorian's analysis of the collective's work after the fact than in their

artistic process as it can be read through the archives (which includes video,

photographs and other visual material), their artistic output (including signs,

performances, walking tours and public gatherings) and responses to their work

on the part of various actors, including municipal authorities, audience members

and art critics. I use secondary resources here, then, to corroborate information

in the archives and my reading of the visual remains of REPOhistory's ephemeral

work (which include some of their signs, photographs of their signs in situ, videos

of performances, brochures, posters, maps and notes for walking tours). When

information or ideas found in secondary sources are not corroborated by the

archives but are of interest, I note whose perspective is reflected in the

secondary source.

A Short History of REPOhistory

In the spring of 1989 Gregory Sholette, a radical New York-based emerging

artist, wrote and circulated a proposal for a project that would: "retrieve and

relocate absent historical narratives at specific locations in the New York City

area through counter-monuments, actions, and events."[179] The proposal

envisioned a collective of interested people researching historical locations

based on a set of critical themes, including labor history, race and, local politics,

followed by the creation of site-specific work by artists/activists based on this research. The idea for the project was inspired by a site-specific show that Hans Haacke (with whom Sholette had studied) contributed to, in Graz, Austria.[180] *Points of Reference 38/88* (Curator Werner Fenz, 1988) exposed Nazi history from fifty years past, highlighting sites of 1930s Nazi activity throughout Graz and igniting debate about the extent to which the legacy of this history lives on today. The exhibit provoked violent response from neo-Nazis, who firebombed a memorial to people killed by the Nazi regime shortly before the show was to close.[181] "It seemed like some historical points of reference remain alive, like nerve-ends, just beneath the surface", Sholette has said, of *Points of Reference 38/88*.[182] Taking inspiration from this ability of the past to "disturb the present",[183] Sholette's original call-out emphasized collective action, a critical approach to history and the production of public art work. A covering letter to the proposal, written to friend Lisa Maya Knauer (who became a co-founder of *REPOhistory)* read: "I have come to the conclusion that only when individuals gather to work on something that holds a mutual interest for them will things get done. Examining the way history is and has been represented or the way certain histories have <u>not</u> been represented has become of paramount interest of mine…I figure the least I can do is put some things out in a "public" context. "[184]

The first meetings of the group that would become *REPOhistory* were held from spring through fall 1989 and included a number of prominent or soon to be-prominent figures in the spheres of activist, performance-based and community-based art, including Lucy Lippard, Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman. In

their early meetings, the collective discussed possible critical responses to the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas and questions concerning "how counter historical narratives can be organized."[185] Group members were asked to present to each other on their own cultural backgrounds and how these backgrounds related to their interest in history. Each group member also researched and proposed a New York site for a counter-historical marker. Organizations such as the *Radical Historian's Organization*, *City Lore* and the *Chinatown History Project* were listed as important resources to consult. The works of Eduardo Galeano, Walter Benjamin and Edward Said were mined for their ideas on history and representation.

From the get-go the collective that was to become *REPOhistory* understood their artmaking as a political act. A key goal was: "to provide multiple viewpoints that encourage viewers to think critically, to explore how histories and their interpretations affect us today, and to engage with specific communities in order to facilitate their efforts to construct their own public histories."[186] The importance of bringing historical narrative to bear on current social relations was emphasized in early meetings as was the importance of bringing marginalized history to the surface in order to challenge ongoing race-based, class-based and gender-based injustices. A shared premise for the group was a view of the 1990s as a period of increasing historical amnesia, even as historical images, names and references were being used to market urban neighbourhoods and sites.[187]

REPOhistory not only committed itself from the beginning to undertaking critical activist work but to also to undertaking research and art making as a

democratic collective. Working collectively was already familiar territory for many of the group's original members, who had previously worked together from 1980-1986 as Political Art Documentation/Distrubution (PAD/D),[188] a New York-based group whose mission statement was "[t]o provide artists with an organized relationship to society, to demonstrate the political effectiveness of image making, and to provide a framework within which progressive artists can discuss and develop alternatives to the mainstream art system".[189] Working collectively was central to the politics of both PAD/D and *REPOhistory*. This meant making all key decisions as a group and striving for consensus wherever possible. It also meant sharing administrative tasks and the combination of privileges and responsibilities that come with leadership in a group. *REPOhistory* put considerable energy into meeting regularly as a collective and into writing minutes of their meetings, which would then be mailed to all absentee members.

It is evident from meeting minutes that the size of the collective fluctuated considerably. As Sholette puts it: "Whenever we initiated a new project the size of the group doubled, tripled as additional people got involved. But once that particular project ended most of these people would also move leaving the core group to plan for the next project. *REPOhistory*'s flexible membership was analogous to the informal administrative structure of the group."[190] The core membership was disproportionately white and male given the makeup of New York City and the group's commitment to exploring race and gender-based historical injustices. In notes for a talk given to the New York Historical Society about the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*, long-term member Lisa Maya Knauer

noted that the collective had struggled in its attempts to develop a more diverse membership for the project but "were only partially successful…A total of 49 people worked on the sign project. 16 were people of color and 22 were women."[191] It is also evident from the archives that people who dedicated the most time to REPOhistory were able to rely on other sources of income, participating in the collective largely as unpaid activist artists. This, along with the fact that a number of members had attended art school at Cooper Union (a private college in Manhattan) suggests a certain level of class privilege amongst core members of the group. Relying on written documents and the reflections of core group members after the fact, it is difficult to deeply analyze to what extent a commitment to diversity was or was not embodied in REPOhistory's working processes. It is also difficult to get a clear sense of the social locations of the broader group of REPOhistory members, beyond core members. Nonetheless, it is important to note what we do know about the demographic of the group and to keep this in mind when considering REPOhistory's work.

Most of *REPOhistory*'s projects culminated in the exhibition of site-specific street signs designed by individual artists and vetted by the group. Five of the collective's seven exhibitions consisted primarily of these historical markers, most of which mimicked official city signage in shape and size.[192] Many REPOhistory projects incorporated other art forms as well as the signs, though. The *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* (New York, 1992) included an annotated map of the sign locations and REPOhistory members offered guided walking tours of New York's financial district (with stops at key REPOhistory signs). The exhibition

opening was marked by a performative parade that included papier maché puppets, music and an original script. *Choice Histories* (New York, 1991), an exhibition on the history of women's struggles for reproductive rights, consisted of a gallery installation and accompanying essays and discussions. *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* (Atlanta, Georgia, 1995), a site-specific installation about a primarily black neighbourhood razed to the ground in the name of urban renewal, exhibited REPOhistory's trademark street signs but also included a one day reunion of over 100 past residents of the neighbourhood, a video compilation of oral history interviews and a stenciled map drawn in the parking lot of the Atlanta Civic Center, where "Buttermilk Bottom" once stood.[193]

Despite the importance of REPOhistory's other artistic outcomes, the collective received the most attention for the site-specific signs it made. Produced through a photo silkscreen process and made of vinyl coated steel, these signs were for the most part mounted on street poles, using similar brackets to those used by city departments for traffic signs. The signs for the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*, for example, were double-sided, measuring 24 x 18 inches. They were a combination of text and images united by a common set of questions posed at the base of the sign, questions such as: *Whose memories are recorded? Is this site a historic site?* The signs made for future REPOhistory projects varied in size, shape and material but continued the tradition of combining text and image and posing provocative questions in public space. Within the confines of this form however, the aesthetics of the signs made by REPOhistory actually varied considerably. A letter describing the signs made for

Entering Buttermilk Bottom notes that some "carry extensive text. Some none at all; some are polemic, some are poetic."[194] This same diversity can be noted throughout REPOhistory's work. While some signs mimic the aesthetics of official historical plaques, others more closely resemble Constructivist graphics while others yet show images of everyday objects or photographs of past residents. The text on the signs ranges in language (some signs are in both Spanish and English) and tone (from a more formal recounting of historical events to calls for justice). The range of aesthetic choices within each REPOhistory project indicate both a commitment to individual creative freedom with a collective frame and, as I discuss in greater depth shortly, diverse conceptualizations of who the primary the audience for the work might be and of the relationship between art object and audience.

I discuss notable differences between the artistic processes and products in various REPOhistory projects for the rest of this chapter but a commonality throughout the collective's work together was that the vast majority of their time was spent researching marginalized histories and discussing how to represent them. In a 1995 letter introducing REPOhistory to new partnering artists, long-time member Neill Bogan wrote:

> REPO's oddity as an art process is that we spend most of our time collecting masses of historic information and then in painstakingly winnowing it down- to a few telling details that can strike home with the viewer. The process often has more in common with creating and editing a documentary book than with making a piece of sculpture.[195]

The collective was committed to thorough research and went to considerable lengths to ensure that their work was historically accurate.

While REPOhistory's first project, the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*, was self-initiated, future projects were the result of partnerships with community groups, political organizations and art institutions. *Queer Spaces* (1994, New York), an exhibition of eight signs marking "places of struggle" and "places of strength" for gays, lesbians and trans people in New York City, for example, was the result of a call for submissions issued by the Storefront for Art and Architecture for an exhibition entitled *Queer Space*. *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* was part of the 1995 Arts Festival of Atlanta's City Site Works program and involved "dozens of former neighbourhood residents…(a)nd many local organizations, including churches, schools, and neighbourhood groups."[196] *Voices of Renewal,* a follow-up to *Entering Buttermilk Bottom,* took the form of a public art residency, in which REPOhistory member Tom Klem worked collaboratively with residents of the Fourth Ward's Glen Iris neighbourhood in Atlanta.

Finally, it is important to note that REPOhistory always strove to work in a self-reflexive manner. Analysis of the group's original documents, particularly meeting minutes, suggest that self-reflexivity and critical discussion were crucial values for the collective. While an intention to work self-reflexively does not and cannot guarantee a leveling of power with a group (there is no doubt that systemic oppressions were replicated within REPOhistory, and written records, no matter how detailed, are likely to leave this out), the group's efforts to be self-reflexive make a close look at REPOhistory all the more interesting. Members of the collective asked themselves many of the questions that continue to concern

socially engaged artists today and strove to create critical historical artwork in the most responsible and effective way they could. Artists with the same goal today have much to learn from this seminal group, both from their successes and from an informed critique of their practice.

Situating REPOhistory *Art* Historically

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to examining site-specificity and social engagement in three of REPOhistory's projects (*Lower Manhattan Sign Project, Entering Buttermilk Bottom* and *Civil Disturbances)* in depth. Part of what I do in my analyses of these projects is situate them art historically, pointing out their relationships to different lineages of socially engaged artistic practice. At this point, suffice it to say more generally, that the collective described their work as part of a tradition of "strong, alternative social commentary", drawing inspiration from the Berlin Dadaists and Russian Constructivists.[197] Sholette has since described REPOhistory as a Do It Yourself (DIY) project, linking this work to the punk DIY culture of the 1980s-1990s.[198]

Contemporary influences for REPOhistory included counter-monumental artists like Krzysztof Wodiczko and, as already mentioned, Hans Haacke. The group also drew inspiration from social history projects like Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980) and the *New York Chinatown History Project* (John Kuo Tchen, 1980-),[199] the exhibition of text-based works in public space by artists Jenny Holzer, Edgar Hachivi Heap of Birds and Gloria Bornstein,[200] and art/activism by interventionist collectives such as Gran Fury

and Group Material.[201] As already noted, a number of REPOhistory members had worked together previously as members of Political Art Documentation (known as PAD/D, New York,1980-1986), a collective dedicated to collecting and archiving radical left art. PAD/D's "anti-gentrification" project (in which the exteriors of abandoned buildings were turned into temporary exhibition spaces) and Group Material's *Da Zibaos* (in which large posters were posted on the exterior of an empty department store) were cited as influences.[202] As mentioned, *Points of reference 38/88* was credited as a direct inspiration for REPOhistory's first project.

In turn, *REPOhistory* has left its mark on site-specific activist art. A number of collectives and projects that are active today reference REPOhistory's work either directly or indirectly. These include: The Howling Mob Society (Pittsburgh, PA),[203] Missing Plaque Project (Toronto), the Center for Land Use Interpretation (Los Angeles), [murmur] (Toronto), Broken City Lab (Windsor, Ontario) and my own project, *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* (Toronto). REPOhistory was part of a wave of groups and projects in the 1980s-1990s that blurred the lines between art and activism, provoking questions like: "But is it art?"[204] These projects have informed many of today's socially engaged artists, who continue to blur those lines, acting as arts-based researchers, educators, geographers and amateur historians.[205]

It is also useful to consider the broader art historical and social context in which REPOhistory functioned. The group's emphasis on collective decision-making no doubt emerged from widespread experimentation with collective forms

in the sixties and seventies and rejection of the capitalist economy of the art

market. Beginning their work in the late eighties, however, REPOhistory

functioned in the context of Reaganism (through to George H.W. Bush's tenure

as president, and then Bill Clinton's). The so-called "culture wars"[206] of the 1990s

were in full force and, as I discuss later in this chapter, the collective's work was

impacted by the continued rise of neoliberalism and increasing urban

securitization (specifically Rudolph Giuliani's tenure as mayor of New York City).

This time also saw a rise in D.I.Y culture (associated with anarchist values as

well as punk), culture-jamming and performative street occupations like *Reclaim*

the Streets. REPOhistory's work then, was very much a product of its times, in

that it was challenging broader cultural values, was premised on an activist

subculture and was focused in reclamation of conventional forms (in this case

street signage) and interventions in urban space.

Site-Specificity and Social Engagement: Creative Tensions in REPOhistory

In 1995 Greg Sholette wrote a letter to *REPOhistory* members, sharing his

perspective on the collective after six years of work together:

> REPOhistory has… developed a unique approach to public culture, one
> that merges the <u>visual arts</u> with <u>pedagogy</u> and <u>social history</u>…My
> suspicion is our success at this historical juncture…is in fact the result of
> the way the group straddles these different institutional interests with their
> particular fields of knowledge….[207]

I focus precisely on the "hybridity" and "straddling" to which Sholette refers for the

remainder of this chapter. Not only did REPOhistory occupy a unique position in

relation to the worlds of public art, education and historical museums but over the

years REPOhistory also straddled a range of approaches to site-specificity and social engagement, making the group's work rich for analysis. While at first glance most of REPOhistory's projects appear similar in form, close examination reveals a range of different approaches to site-specific engagement. The differences between these approaches reflect both a range of art historical lineages influencing the collective and the different urban contexts in which REPOhistory worked between 1989 and 2000. I turn to these different approaches for the remainder of this chapter, discussing three *REPOhistory* projects in depth: *The Lower Manhattan Sign Project* (New York, 1992), *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* (Atlanta,1995) *and Civil Disturbances* (1999).

The Lower Manhattan Sign Project: The City as a Place for Politics?

REPOhistory worked together for three years (1989-1992) to produce its first project, the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* (LMSP). The LMSP culminated in the exhibition of 36 signs (made by over 40 artists) in the financial district of Manhattan. The signs were installed on city lampposts with permission from the Department of Transportation, who granted the collective a one-year permit to exhibit the signs in public space. They were exhibited between June 1992 and May 1993 and were initially installed in partnership with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council as part of an event called *1992 ¿the Americas?,* a pilot project exploring "ideas of art, history, and identity in relationship to the Columbus quincentennial celebrations of 1992."[208]

The reasons for creating the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*, the research

process that REPOhistory undertook to create this project, the content and

aesthetics of the signs produced as part of this project and the choice of sites in

which to install them all reveal an approach to both site-specificity and social

engagement in the LMSP that has much in common with 1990s European

counter-monumental art practices.[209] Counter-monuments are a key artistic

lineage in site-specific socially engaged work. I will show in this section that, like

counter-monuments, the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* took up site-specificity in

order to communicate with a broad public, treating the city as an expanded

exhibition space (*a place for politics*) and contesting place as much at a national

scale as an urban scale. Later in the chapter I contrast this approach with

REPOhistory's subsequent projects *Buttermilk Bottom* and *Civil Disturbances*.

An Overview of the LMSP

As I have already indicated, members of REPOhistory initially gathered in light of

a shared interest in sparking dialogue on critical contemporary political issues

through a focus on excluded and radical histories. When the group first met, they

discussed responding collectively to the quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in

the Americas and its attendant celebrations.[210] Lucy Lippard (herself an early

member of the collective) recounts events this way:

> Because many of the members were working already to counteract the
> official Columbus Quincentennial events, it was suggested at early
> meetings that the theme of colonialism/racism be adopted and the signs
> be scattered throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn, so that people could
> deal with their own neighborhoods and local education. One ambitious

idea was to map the entire city and catalogue the historical sites in order to determine an overriding theme. Finally the group decided to focus for the time being on the lost history of lower Manhattan, where it all began, and where most events could be categorized as colonialism and racism.[211]

Indeed, minutes from REPOhistory's early meetings show a range of initial ideas for a collective project, including direct interventions with existing monuments and making "portable dioramas with revisionist historical scenes inside that could be wheeled onto the sidewalk at specific locations or in front of particular monuments."[212]

Approximately a year after the collective first gathered, members settled on making site-specific signs recounting a series of forgotten or marginalized historical events in the Financial District of Manhattan.[213] REPOhistory worked hard over the next year and a half to bring a large and diverse group of artists into the project. Over 40 artists eventually contributed to the show. While in the end each sign was attributed to one or two individuals, REPOhistory did their historical research collectively and sign designs were vetted by the collective.[214] Ideas for signs and research material were given to some artists who wanted to contribute to the project, while other artists did their own research.

While a review of all of the LMSP signs is beyond the scope of this chapter, a broad overview of the themes and aesthetic of the exhibition is instructive. As mentioned in my introduction to REPOhistory, all signs were vinyl-coated steel and measured 18 x 24 inches. Replicating the size and shape of official street signs, they were installed on street poles in Lower Manhattan. All signs were a combination of graphics and text and included two questions

(always in the same font) as well as the REPOhistory logo on one side of the sign. The questions varied between signs but were commonly two of the following possibilities:

> Whose history is remembered?
> Is this history a part of your history?
> Do other stories go untold?
> Is this an historic site?
> Is this an important moment in history?
> Who makes use of this history?
> Is history truth or interpretation?
> Can memory be colonized?
> How do you know the past?
> What does this place mean to you?
> What meanings do you bring to this place?
> Is history progress or power?[215]

Beyond these commonalities in form, the aesthetics of the signs varied. Some were hand-drawn, others were photographs, some drew on archival images while others were very clearly contemporary. Most bore extensive text considering their size, though the tone of the text ranged. Historical themes covered by the signs included immigration and early urban diasporas, First Nations history and colonial relations, slavery, homelessness, war, labour, American federal politics, access to healthcare. Most signs focused on struggles for justice vis-à-vis these themes. Some drew on stories of individuals to personalize the theme while others stuck to impersonal narrative. The vast majority of text was written in English.

Juxtaposition of a few specific sign examples also gives a sense of the project. The front of sign #1 in the set, *Potter's Field/Ellis Island* (artist Jayne Pagnucco) is largely filled with a 19th Century photograph of men digging a

trench half-filled with wooden coffins on a winter's day. Text above the photograph reads: "What is all-inclusive history?" The photograph is titled: "Potter's Field, Hart's Island, the Jacob A. Riis Collection." The other side of the sign is filled with text telling the story of "Rose" a poor immigrant who arrived in New York Harbour only to die in detention on Ellis Island after being singled out for being "mentally defective". The text frames Rose's story in a the larger picture of treatment of poor immigrants upon arrival and offers possible hypotheses as to how her body was disposed of, including burial in an unmarked grave on Hart Island. *India House* (sign # 12, artist Leela Ramotar) centers on a single colour filled-in map of the United States with "INDIA" written across it. Text above the shape reads (all in caps): "WHERE IS THE FABULOUS WEALTH OF INDIA, THE SPICES SILKS AND GEMS WHICH COLUMBUS SOUGHT?" Below the image are the words: "GOD, GOLD and GLORY." According to the LMSP catalogue,[216] the back of this sign referenced the historical and continued existence of India House, a club for business men. Sign #14 (artist Jim Constanzo) is a striking graphic of a business man falling head first from the sky, a mass of hands reaching out towards him from below. The text reads: "ADVANTAGES OF AN UNREGULATED FREE ECONOMY" and the sign was installed in front of the New York Stock Exchange. The LMSP opened on June 27, 1992 with a parade walking tour of eight of the project's 36 signs.

The First Chinese Community in NYC. EPOXY Art Group. Sign #20 in REPOhistory's *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

John Jacob Astor and Native Americans. Alan Michelson. Sign #21 in REPOhistory's *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Madame Restell and *Anthony Comstock* (2 signs). Lisa Maya Knauer and Janet Koenig. Signs #23 in REPOhistory's *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Homelessness: Forgotten Histories. Tom Klem. Sign #6 in REPOhistory's *Lower Manhattan Sign Project.* Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Indian Giver or When Will America Be Discovered? Todd Ayoung. Sign #2 in REPOhistory's
Lower Manhattan Sign Project. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

The LMSP's Approach to Site-Specificity: Contesting the Nation

It is interesting to consider scale when looking at the LMSP as a site-specific

project. The content of the signs produced for this project and the choice of

Lower Manhattan as a site meant that the project intervened as much in

narratives of the nation (and, to a lesser extent, global inequities) and as it did in urban or local narratives. New York (and Lower Manhattan in particular) functioned primarily in this project as a symbol of the nation. The histories presented in the project were generally framed as examples of a bigger picture, rather than as distinctly local.

The LMSP's interest in the national and international rather than the local can be seen both in the project's formal approach and in the historical content it took up. Faux-official historical signs affixed to lampposts could work in any urban landscape.[217] In fact, Lippard's introductory essay for the LMSP catalogue encourages viewers to take up REPOhistory's approach, offering it "as a model for any community large or small."[218] And certainly the themes taken up in the project (racism, colonialism, labour conditions, etcetera) could be taken up elsewhere in the United States with significant political and emotional reverberations. Many of the signs themselves, in fact, despite detailed research and commitment to historical accuracy, could be only slightly altered to work elsewhere. A sign titled *Whitehall Induction Centre*(#7 in LMSP series, artist Betti-Sue Hertz) shows an image of an anti-war protestor on one side and napalm victims on the other. Most of the text is from a 1967 anti-war song about a man who is arbitrarily sent to war to die. Another sign, *Origin of the Word "Indian"* (#10, artist Gustavo Silva) displays text from Columbus' travel log on one side, in which he describes the Arawak people as "gente vivien endios (translated as 'a people living in/with god'), and the word "ENDIOS" repeating and gradually fading into the word "INDIOS" on the other. Another sign, *False

Democracy: Inequality of the U.S. Senate (#15, artist Ed Eisenberg) takes up the fact that small states have as much sway in the senate as large states, with much larger populations. The image on this sign is a set of scales, tipped unevenly.

While there are certainly examples of signs that could not easily be altered to work elsewhere (two different signs that explore the colonial and gendered origins of specific street names are examples) the majority of signs in the LMSP employ imagery that is not particular to New York City and frame struggles for justice in New York City as symbols of national and international struggles. This approach to site-specificity is reiterated in an invitation to participate in walking tours of the LMSP, sent to educators in October 1992, which states that "[a] variety of issues—Native American displacement, slavery, segregation, labor rights, women's rights—will be raised through local New York City examples."[219]

It should come as no surprise that site-specificity was taken up at a national scale in the project, rather than a local or urban one. Throughout REPOhistory's early years we can see a creative tension between a desire to work site-specifically and an interest in broad themes. It is important to remember that the group first came together in response to the Columbus quincentennial, an Americas wide commemoration of European contact with the Americas. While REPOhistory did archival research into first contact in New York (representing, for example, the contested 'purchase' of Manhattan in 1626) it is worth remembering that Columbus did not land anywhere near New York, that the

history of first contact in Manahatta (the Lenape name for the island known as Manhattan), rather, includes interactions between the Lenape people and explorers Verrazano (1524) and Hudson (1609) and, shortly after, the Dutch, the first colonial settlers in Manahatta.

 A 1998 unpublished paper by Knauer also contextualizes the LMSP as a (counter) national project. Knauer refers to the project as a response to the culture wars of the late 1980s, which, like the Columbus quincentennial, were not specific to New York. REPOhistory members were broadly aligned in their desire to take up issues of colonialism, classism, racism and sexism and that critical history became a focus for the collective *insofar* as it could bring current inequities into frame.[220] Throughout the first year of working together, in which members of the collective read and discussed a number of texts in order to consider the methodological challenges of critical history, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* and, *Multi-cultural Literacy: Opening the American Mind* (Simonson and Walker, 1988), a collection that includes essays by Gloria Anzaldua, James Baldwin, Guillermo-Gomez Peña and other critical American writers/theorists of color, were sources of inspiration. Sholette has since said that one could consider the LMSP "a graphic tribute to Zinn's revisionist project."[221]

For the LMSP, then, REPOhistory started with broad themes and then sought out sites and artists who could animate these themes site-specifically. An introductory page of the catalogue reads:

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We work to reclaim the past and represent it as a multilayered, living narrative that includes the untold stories of those who have been marginalized or disenfranchised because of their class, race, gender or sexuality… REPOhistory seeks to question how history is constructed, to demystify the official versions, and insert the stories, peoples and events which have been omitted. Our intent is not to substitute "our version" for "their version" but to provoke critical and multiple readings.[222]

On one hand this statement was true, but REPOhistory very clearly looked for certain types of stories (related to their themes of racism, sexism, classism and colonialism) and then found sites that worked as local examples. Most of the historical information for this project was drawn from archives and secondary sources, as opposed to oral histories. The catalogue for the LMSP includes a lengthy bibliography and list of historical organizations and archives consulted for the project. This approach to site-specificity can be contrasted to what site-specific performance practitioner and theorist Mike Pearson calls an "archaeological approach", in which themes are developed out of an encounter with a site.[223] In fact, there were questions throughout the project as to whether site-specificity was a means or an end in the project. One internal report (produced for members only) asks: "What are the goals and purposes of this project? (e.g. do we want people think about this space differently? do we want them to think about colonialism differently?)"[224] A document written by Sholette near the end of the production period for the LMSP suggests that artists did not even necessarily visit the site in which their sign would be exhibited. In the future, Sholette writes, REPOhistory should "encourage artists to visit their site so they might pick up on aspects of the local social or architectural setting for their design."[225] This comment is indicative of the LMSP's primary contestation of

place at a national and international scale rather than a local one. The project was conceptual and symbolic but was not particularly grounded in Manhattan's history and dynamics.

It could also be argued that REPOhistory's choice to situate the project in the financial district of Manhattan contributed to the LMSP's contestation of place primarily at a national scale. Knauer writes that the collective:

> decided to work in Manhattan for both pragmatic and conceptual reasons. The pragmatic reason was that it would be easier to get publicity and find an audience in Manhattan; the conceptual reason was the financial district was the site of the original Dutch colony in the 17th century; the site where the Indians supposedly sold the island to the Dutch colonists. And, even though the hegemony of the U.S. isn't as solid as it once previously (sic), it is still one of the centers of global capitalism."[226]

An untitled internal letter from 1991 states: "We've chosen the Financial District because it is both a logical starting point historically, laden with official representations of New York's past as a colonial out-post, and because of its continuing role today as a nerve center for economic colonization."[227] By the 1990s Manhattan was certainly a site oversaturated with meaning- one of the world's top tourist destinations, known as *the* center of American finance, a centre of global finance and a popular symbol of the American dream of equal opportunity. Mythologies associated with New York's Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Broadway, Wall Street and the intercultural exchanges that are part of daily life within its tightly packed land mass, are widely disseminated around the world. New York City is a place that conjures up a rote set of images for many people who have never set foot in the city and most of these images revolve

around the island of Manhattan. Lower Manhattan, in particular, symbolizes the heart of empire, the belly of the beast or, to use REPohistory's own bodily metaphor, the "nerve centre" of finance.[228] As the collective themselves noted, Lower Manhattan is also already marked with a number of monuments and historic markers highlighting its national significance as a site.

To say that the LMSP approached site-specificity as a (counter) national project is neither to deny the potential affective resonance of its site-specificity nor its readability at an urban scale. Nor was disregard for the physical features or local culture of sites monolithic within the project. Artist Tom Klem's sign *Homelessness/Forgotten Histories* responded to his own observations of a particular street corner. The text on the sign (# 6 in the LMSP set) reads: "On the fourth day of the month of March in the year nineteen ninety one, three homeless americans passed a very cold and bitter night on this spot in lower manhattan..." The sign is designed in the style of an 'official' brass plaque, the lettering appearing three-dimensional from a distance. Another sign, titled *The First Alms House* (artists Andy Morse and Anita Musilli, #33), features a close-up photograph of a middle-aged man's face and the text: "Nowhere to go. In memory of June. Born March 3, 1945- Died February 2, 1992." The text on the other side of this sign makes a connection between June's death as a homeless man and the fact that an 18th century alms house once functioned near the site. And even signs that did focus on broad struggles rather than the specific contours or history of the site had the potential to resuscitate New York as a site of social conflict, contesting hegemonic representations of the city as an

embracing melting pot par excellence.[229] Still, as I will elaborate on shortly, it is

not clear that the signs provoked as much dialogue as REPOhistory members

had hoped they would. This is quite possibly related to the national and

international scale at which the project engaged with site-specific histories as

well as the choice of Lower Manhattan as a site.

The LMSP and Social Engagement: Provoking a Broad Public?
REPOhistory chose to exhibit the LMSP in public space primarily in order to draw

a 'broad' audience. "We wanted to take the issues in the debate and put them

where everybody who walks through the streets of New York City can be

confronted or provoked or challenged by the information", said Knauer at the time

of the exhibition.[230] Minutes from an early meeting define the audience for the

project as: "a)tourists, b) people living in the neighbourhood, c) people working

there."[231] Another document reads:

> Every day, hundreds of thousands of office workers, lawyers, security
> guards, stockbrokers and maintenance workers from all five boroughs
> pass through the Financial District en route to work; during the warmer
> months, many of them eat in the public spaces scattered throughout the
> district. As host to With the presence of the New York Stock Exchange,
> the World Trade Center, the World Financial Center, Battery Park, and the
> Liberty Island and Ellis Island ferry landings, the Financial District is a
> magnet for tourists from New York City, other parts of the country and
> abroad, as well as visiting school groups. REPOhistory's street signs will
> be situated in areas well-traveled by these varied populations.[232]

For REPOhistory, exhibiting art in public space was a way to avoid only engaging

an "art audience", a goal that is repeatedly mentioned in meeting minutes and

correspondence. In this project the group operated with the understanding that

passers-by, be they workers, residents or tourists, would find the signs of interest at least on a surface level, and that some audience members would then go deeper with the work. Just exactly who the public was for each project remained an open question.

In light of the group's critical thinking about the politics of representation (very much focused on *which* groups had been excluded from official 'History') the LMSP's reliance on such a liberal concept of the public sphere is somewhat surprising. REPOhistory notes from the production period for the LMSP posit that "by appropriating and transforming an existing format, REPOhistory's signs will be immediately accessible to viewers. The combination of striking graphic imagery and provocative texts will allow for both casual and more reflective "readings" of the signs.[233] However, as I have mentioned, most signs were very text-heavy given their size and this, in combination with the kind of language employed and the height at which they were installed, meant that their readability relied on a relatively educated audience, fluent in English. Meeting minutes from early days of the group's work together propose future discussion of "[o]ur relationship to the people's histories, events, we choose to represent. What motivates us? Are our agendas fully known to us?" What is our relationship to the audience- public that experiences our work?"[234] These comments and others indicate that questions of audience haunted the group from the get-go but the final exhibition suggests that they were never resolved. Instead site-specificity was taken up in this project in order to access a non-specialized but *unspecified* audience. The only exception to this generalist approach to audience in the

LMSP was REPOhistory's considerable effort to outreach to students (primarily high school students). Notes from the fall of 1992 repeatedly mention efforts to draw school groups out to walking tours of the signs.

REPOhistory's approach to social engagement was not only marked by a liberal conception of the public sphere but also took up an avant-garde approach to social engagement, in which the artist acts as an educator or provocateur. While the experience of working collectively to recover and represent critical histories was no doubt richly educative, the collective's notes and interviews after the fact focus solely on education of the audience. Sholette has stated that "[a]ctivist art is pedagogical by nature"[235] and REPOhistory meeting minutes and correspondence consistently highlight the group's interest in creating projects in order to educate the general public about the city's counter-histories. While clearly created through a generative process, much like many of today's social practice and community arts projects, the LMSP was designed to provoke viewers upon its completion, illuminating a hidden history of the city. Meeting minutes for the LMSP read: "We determined that we would most successfully attract [the public's] attention if we infiltrated their processes of consummation [*sic*]…. [i]n order to have any effects on our audience's way of thinking/understanding of history we would have to take into account their perspectives, their points of entry being working place, home or holiday."[236] The audience, then, was considered as a monolithic entity. Individuals were expected to read the LMSP signs critically as individuals. It is unclear from the archival

documents whether the walking tours for school groups took up a more dialogical approach, in which the signs were used to provoke deeper conversation.

Art-Historical Lineage #1: Counter-Monuments

The LMSP has much in common with a genre of site-specific socially engaged art that scholar James Young has termed "counter-monuments."[237] Young defines counter-monuments as "memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument."[238] Referencing work in the 1990s by German artists grappling with the legacy of the Holocaust (Horst Hoheisel, Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, among others) Young suggests that counter-monuments are rejections of monumentality, defined by their openness, incompletion and fleetingness. The counter-monuments Young writes about take the form of slowly disappearing columns (*Monument against Fascism* by Jochen Gerz and Esther Chalev-Gerz, Hamburg-Harburg, 1986), ephemeral site-specific projections (Norbert Radermacher's *Neukölln Memorial*, Berlin, 1994) and provocative street-signage (Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock's *Places of Remembrance*, Berlin, 1992-1993). They tend to highlight their temporariness and non-monumentality.[239]

Most of Young's examples of counter-monuments are site-specific, referencing a history related to the precise site in which they are installed, and designed with that site in mind. These artworks avoid allegory or universalism in favour of individualized or specific histories.[240] They are much more likely to reference specific historical details than traditional monuments are. And yet, like

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the LMSP, European counter-monumental practices of 1990s engage with specific urban sites in order to reference a *national* history.[241] The counter-monuments Young writes about endeavour to prompt critical memory of historical acts of violence undertaken in the name of the nation (the Holocaust). The sites through which to represent the specificities of that violence were chosen secondarily by the artists, who looked for sites and stories that would function as powerful examples of a traumatic past. In the counter-monumental tradition place is a vehicle through which to engage with memory, a mnemononic device which refers not only to itself but to history elsewhere.

This said, even as Young's counter-monuments contest site at the scale of the nation they also reframe urban places as sites of absence and unease.[242] Hoheisel, the Gerzes, Radermacher, Stih, Schnock and others illuminate the ugly histories that urban geography and the performance of daily life obscure. Complicity in forgetfulness becomes part of the history of the site, part of the story that the counter-monumental artist takes responsibility for.[243] Christian Boltanski's *The Missing House* (Berlin, 1990) serves as an example of this emphasis on site as absence. This installation draws attention to a space between two houses, previously the site of an apartment building occupied entirely by Jews, which was destroyed by bombing in 1945. Rather than fill the space in any way, Boltanski researched the buildings' past inhabitants and installed plaques with their personal information (names, birth and death dates, occupations) on the walls of the houses on either side of the vacant lot.[244]

As defined by Young, counter-monuments also conceive of social engagement in a similar fashion to the LMSP. Their primary objective is to provoke active spectatorship and public dialogue about the past and they attempt to do this through provocation. Young writes: "It is as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember."[245] Counter-monuments, in contradistinction to this, are "anti-redemptive",[246] refusing closure and treating memory instead as a open wound.[247] Rather than seek completion of a historical episode, counter-monuments encourage their audience to write the next chapter of the story responsibly and ethically. Artist Horst Hoheisel described his counter-monumental sculpture *Aschrott Brunnen* (Kassel, 1985), a sculptural form buried underground, as "an invitation to passersby who stand upon it to search for the memorial in their own heads"[248]. Counter-monuments do not seek to avoid antagonism but rather assert that it is a political act to remember and, equally, a political act to forget.

The LMSP is also similar to the counter-monuments that Young describes in its conceptualization of who will engage with the work and how. The counter-monuments Young writes about it do not appear to have been designed with any particular public in mind but, instead, attempt to foster public engagement through the exhibition of finished sculptural objects, counting on critical (individual) public reception of the work. Rather than drawing on oral histories and public storytelling, as community-based artists might, the artistic methodologies of European 1990s counter-monumental artists tended to involve

intensive archival research or work with written documents. These counter-monuments were usually the work of a single artist or artistic duo, created in order to "force both visitors and local citizens to look within themselves for memory, at their actions and motives for memory within these spaces."[249] Social engagement, then, is conceived as something fostered after the completion of the artwork and taken up individually by passers-by.

Evaluating Counter-Monuments and the LMSP

Young argues that the sign of a successful countermonument is the public debate it provokes.[250] In this artistic tradition conflict is seen as part of the ongoing injury of traumatic historical events and the negation of conflict is viewed as an evasion of these continued injuries. Jochen Gerz and Esther Chalev-Gerz, for example, did not remove neo-nazi graffiti from their *Monument Against Fascism* but viewed it instead as an ugly presence in contemporary Germany that had to be acknowledged, and as further proof of the need to continue to actively fight fascism.[251] Counter-monumental artists are not interested in closure, resolution or public reconciliation but in maintaining active responsibility for the past, present and future. This genre "contemptuously reject[s]…those spaces that either console viewers or redeem such tragic events..."[252]

Literature in response to Young's scholarship on counter-monuments, however, has questioned actual public reception of counter-monuments.[253] Counter-monuments have been critiqued for their fetishization of form and it has been suggested that debates over their form have superseded the social debates

intended by the artists.[254] There has, in fact, been very little research on how counter-monuments are actually received.[255] Critical public dialogue and increased social responsibility for both the past and the future may be the goal of counter-monumental artists but does this genre's approach to site-specificity and social engagement foster such dialogue? While the art world has been enthusiastic about counter-monumental practice (evidenced not only in reviews of the work but also in large commissions) the extent to which counter-monuments foster the social responsibility and remembering that they strive to is an open question.

Counter-monumental artists have also been critiqued for their broad conceptualization of the 'public' whom they wish to engage and for lack of public consultation in the initial conceptualization and design of their artworks. Grant Kester, for example, critiques artist Rachel Whiteread in this regard for her piece *House* (1993), which was placed in East London without community consultation.[256] What kind of reception ensues when a local audience is not consulted with? If left unspecified, who is the audience for the work? When counter-monuments are in fact primarily designed with visitors or tourists in mind, to what extent do they succeed in disrupting the everyday performance of place?

More widespread critiques of socially engaged art that attempts to raise issues of social or political import through provocative or disturbing spectacles are also relevant to the evaluation of counter-monuments. Many theorists of contemporary socially engaged art practices define the work they advocate in contradistinction to this approach. Curator Pablo Helguera, for example, defines

socially engaged art as "characterized by the activation of members of the public in roles beyond that of passive receptor" which pursues "a critically self-reflexive dialogue with an engaged community."[257] Kester argues forcefully that an avant-garde tradition in which the artist plays the provocateur ultimately assumes a privileged audience, for whom the inequities revealed by the artwork will be revelatory. In *Conversation Pieces* (2004) and *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (2011) Kester celebrates a contemporary move away from "a 'textual mode of production in which the artist fashions an object or event that is subsequently presented to the viewer"[258] in favour of 'generative' practices in which: "[t]he mode of perception…is not instrumental (site is not a resource for the enactment of an a priori vision or a goal already-in-mind), but rather, anticipatory and open."[259] The artistic practices he champions are not only pedagogical in the sense that they 'educate' their audience but are examples of groups of people making meaning together and learning from their collective experience. In light of these criteria for evaluating counter-monuments, how can we evaluate the LMSP? What can the LMSP teach us about the potential and pitfalls of counter-monumental approaches to site-specificity and social engagement?

If counter-monuments are to be judged on their ability to spark or foster public debate, the first task is to look at the extent to which LMSP did this. Unfortunately, while REPOhistory was aware that it was crucial to analyze how the LMSP was taken up, like many socially engaged artists they lacked the resources to conduct any real analysis of how the project was received.[260]   What

is clear is that the popular media responded favourably to the project, while the art press paid little attention to it.[261] As REPOhistory members themelves did, the media focused on the project's potential to engage an audience through reception of the signs and paid little attention to the pedagogical potential of the artistic process itself.[262] It is also clear that the project faced surprisingly few bureaucratic hurdles considering the critical content of the signs.[263] In fact, the opening day of the LMSP (June 27, 1992) was officially proclaimed "REPOhistory day" by the Manhattan Borough President and New York mayor David Dinkins.[264] Sanctioned installation of the signs, while initially granted for six months, was even extended for an extra six months by the City's administration.

REPOhistory members themselves viewed the project as a success, at least publicly. After the exhibition, collective members cited the fact that some groups independently conducted walking tours as a sign of successful public engagement and also highlighted the significant media coverage the project received.[265] Certainly, the LMSP seems to have contributed to making a name for REPOhistory, who were subsequently invited into a number of institutional partnerships. As Sholette commented in a letter to fellow collective member Bettie-Sue Hertz late in 1992, through the LMSP the collective became a presence "that is perhaps in some ways larger than life".[266] Internal documents, however, reveal more doubt about the project. As REPOhistory's production of the Lower Manhattan Sign Project drew to a close Knauer wrote a letter to the rest of the collective's board asking the following questions:

> Do we see ourselves committed primarily or perhaps even exclusively to
> public art? And if so, what kind of public art? What public are we making

art for (or with)? Is creating projects for museums/galleries an unpleasant necessity or something we actually want to do, given the right circumstances (and what would those be)? Do we have priorities for the types of communities (or arenas—e.g. public schools) in which we'd like to work? How do we see ourselves working with those communities? Do we see ourselves as doing work about them or with them? What kind of a balance do we see ourselves striking between individual and collaborative efforts?[267]

A collective document drawn up in April of 1992 lists "challenges/problems", which include: "knowing what we want from people…How do we want our work to affect viewer?...evaluation of work…repetition of ideas…sticking with a subject…outreach to different communities."[268]

In light of the LMSP's intention to provoke, it is notable that there was in fact little public outcry or debate over the signs, save a complaint about a medical illustration of a hymen on artists Hillary Kliros and Betty Beaumont's sign commemorating the origins of "Maiden Lane" (#25 in the LMSP).[269] In evaluation of a counter-monumental project, which seeks to provoke debate, this can be seen as a shortcoming. While Sholette had been inspired by how Haacke's work in *Points of Reference 38/88* had caused public controversy, the lack of controversy during the year in which the LMSP signs were exhibits suggests a lukewarm response from the generalized public that was REPOhistory's intended audience. There are a number of possible explanations for such a (lack of) response, which have implications for counter-monumental practice.

In her (for the most part congratulatory) catalogue essay for the LMSP, Lippard notes that "while some people didn't event notice [the signs] at all, those who took the time got involved in what they saw and enjoyed it."[270] It is indeed

possible that a lack of public response is because the signs were in fact less

noticeable than the collective had hoped, due to the visual clutter of signage and

advertising in the financial district of New York. REPOhistory had intended that

the signs "create an active dialogue with the [official historical] markers that

already existed."[271] A letter in the archive for this project (from an audience

member), however, suggests that the signs were in fact very difficult to see, even

when one was purposefully looking for them:

> Unfortunately, I never saw one single person who had stopped to read a
> sign… Some are too difficult to read with their faint print far above the
> head of the spectator…who is reading those that are available for
> reading? My experiences are not very encouraging!!!"[272]

The letter goes on to critique the signs aesthetically and, as a single source,

should not be given much weight. Nonetheless it does raise the question of

whether the choice to work site-specifically in a part of the city that is already

oversaturated with visual information was effective.

It is also possible that the project failed to elicit significant controversy

because of the scale at which it functioned. Sholette attributes a lack of

bureaucratic "speed bumps" in 1992 to the fact that the LMSP "didn't fit the

patterns and molds city officials were familiar with" (blurring the lines between art,

commercial venture and education).[273] But, it is important to remember that while

the signs were certainly provocative challenges to the performance of America as

an all-accepting melting pot, they did not directly challenge any one group's

current claim to or occupation of a particular space. Nor did they reference

particular racialized, classed or gendered interactions between current local residents or local controversies. In other words, the LMSP signs, as visually compelling as they were, allowed the political to remain relatively *impersonal* for their audience. While the project used the cityscape as a *place for politics*, bringing critical stories and issues into the public eye, it did not per se touch on a local *politics of place*. It is possible, even likely, that the historical narratives presented in the project had a strong emotional impact on some of their viewers. But they did not implicate their audience enough to produce public responses.

It is, in fact, arguable that the LMSP, despite its critical intent and content, was all-too easily subsumed within a trend toward heritage marketing in the 1990s. Archival documents indicate REPOhistory's increasing anxiety as the 1990s progress that their work might all too easily be co-opted as a form of place-marketing despite their critical intentions. REPOhistory received invitations to work in a number of cities and towns, in order to dig up and exhibit interesting local histories.[274] The collective was keenly aware of the fine line between their work and heritage marketing.[275] A group document from April 1992 includes "avoid[ing] trendiness" as a challenge.[276] It is also interesting to think about the LMSP in light of the many walking tours, audio tours and local museums that operate today in New York. Even as many of them provide critical histories they also promote the city as a tourist destination, adding to its creative 'buzz'. Perhaps in the end the LMSP signs could be relatively easily assimilated into the hegemonic narrative of New York as a symbol of the diversity and immigrant

experience within the nation. Perhaps they could too easily become yet another interesting spectacle adding to the buzz of the city.

What are the implications of a lack of (vocalized) response to the LMSP for contemporary critiques of socially engaged art practices that seek to provoke individual responses to finished artworks? Perhaps there was simply a lack of opportunity for dialogue in response to the signs. Beyond the student walking tours, the archives do not suggest that REPOhistory created forums in which their audience could speak back to signs and the project as a whole. Or perhaps the apparent lack of response was the result of an ultimately condescending conception of audience. Kester critiques the assumption in avant-garde art that the audience consists of open and ultimately empathetic publics who, once enlightened by the revelations of provocative art, will alter their practices. He writes: "Rather than wait for the ideal viewer, these artists seek to actively produce him or her through the experience of consuming the work itself."[277] This, he argues is an "evangelical superiority that conceives of the viewer as a subject-to-be-transformed."[278] Certainly, it does appear that REPOhistory hoped to contribute to personal transformation on the part of the viewers through the LMSP. They did not, however, consciously view themselves as a vanguard, in possession of revelatory knowledge. In 1998, Knauer wrote about the group's desire to problematize history, rather than replace one universalism with another.[279] Meeting minutes express a desire to find "ways to project positive (read non-coercive, non manipulative) visions not just critiques of what currently exists."[280] These sentiments are likely what led to the inclusion of two questions

on each sign, questions like "How do you know the past?", "What does this place mean to you?" and "What meanings do you bring to this place?". These questions were not only rhetorical but positioned viewers themselves as bearers of critical knowledge.

A desire to draw on the knowledge of audience members was also evident in the tone of the inaugural walking tour/parade of the signs. The parade included papier mache puppets, a tour guide speaking in scripted verse (REPOhistory member Neill Bogan in character as "The Deputy Mayor For Doggerel") and live music. Audience members were encouraged to participate by joining in a vocal refrain at the end of each sign introduction. Refrains included phrases like: "*When will America be discovered?" and "Who do we remember? Who will we forget?"*[1] In juxtaposition to the text on many of the signs, the density and language of which anticipates a highly literate viewer, the tone of the parade was very accessible, aimed it seems particularly at young people. Bogan played a kind of wise fool role, as he brought people into the stories behind each sign. Following the inaugural parade, REPOhistory offered more walking tours (publicizing particularly to schools) and distributed a pamphlet with a map of the signs, encouraging individuals to conduct their own walking tours of the project. I was unable to find any mention of the results of the tours in the archives. It would be interesting to learn whether the tours facilitated collective reflections and dialogue.

Lucy Lippard, while she acknowledged the LMSP as a form of provocation, described the LMSP in this way in the project catalogue:

> Accessible, democratic, the signs are neither intrusive nor condescending. They can make people want to know more. The idea was not just to evoke history, but to provide a critical view, to disrupt the ingrained and conditioned perceptions of history and, finally, of who the audience thinks they are.

Still, it is possible that the counter-monumental approach to social engagement, in which the artist hopes to produce "a single, instantaneous shock of insight"[281] for an individual viewer, thereby inspiring him/her to act differently in the future, simply doesn't hold. While Kester can be accused of hyperbole in his critique of this avant-garde tradition, the extent to which public art is capable of producing a shock that is long lasting enough to foster increased social responsibility is questionable. Certainly, as Lippard argues in her essay, such public art can provide new information for viewers, casting the city in a new light. But counter-monuments seek to do more than that. Their goal is prolonged public dialogue. Young argues that the best memorial is "not a single memorial at all- but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end. That is, what are the consequences of such memory?"[282] In light of REPOhistory's activist intentions, the fact that the project did not extend into any form of prolonged dialogue is disappointing.

Without a major survey of the passers-by and tourists whom REPOhistory hoped to engage we can never fully know to what extent the LMSP succeeded as a form of social engagement premised on site-specificity. What is clear, however, is that REPOhistory would take up site-specificity and social

engagement very differently in future projects, including *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*. I turn to that project now.

Entering Buttermilk Bottom: A Politics of Place in the City?

Analysis of REPOhistory's 1995 project, *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*, reveals an approach to site-specificity and social engagement that is notably different than that of the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*. *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* was undertaken in Atlanta Georgia as part of *City Site Works* a series of public art projects curated by Mary Jane Jacobs for the annual Arts Festival of Atlanta.

Atlanta was, obviously, a very different urban context for REPOhistory to work in than New York. As a large city in America's south, built on slavery and with a history of racial segregation, Atlanta has its own legacy of violent racial displacements. *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* commemorated the history of a black neighbourhood colloquially known as "Buttermilk Bottom". Buttermilk Bottom (also know as 'the Bottom') was a de facto segregated and densely packed low-income area with appallingly inadequate urban infrastructure but a strong and resilient community. When, like many other cities, Atlanta underwent a process of urban renewal in the 1960s, in which 'blight' was removed to make way for new development, Buttermilk Bottom was razed to the ground, its residents forced to move elsewhere. The Atlanta Civic Centre now stands where the centre of the neighbourhood once was.[283]

REPOhistory members worked in collaboration with Atlanta artists and residents to recover the history of Buttermilk Bottom for *City Site Works*. The project culminated in the exhibition of twenty historical street signs (installed on street poles, as were the LMSP signs), stenciled street names on the pavement marking the contours of the old neighbourhood, a video of oral history interviews with past Buttermilk Bottom residents, a pavilion installation about the history of the neighbourhood and a live reunion of past Buttermilk Bottom residents. The project was followed the year after by another REPOhistory project, *Voices of Renewal,* in which REPOhistory artist Tom Klem co-produced six historical street markers with Atlanta residents in the city's old Fourth Ward.[284]

Site-Specificity in Entering Buttermilk Bottom

Unlike the LMSP, *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*'s primary foci were local history (the story of a neighbourhood) and urban politics, with obvious national and international reverberations. These foci are evident in REPOhistory's artistic process for the project and in the project's final artistic outcomes. Rather than beginning their historical research with sharing published texts about historical methodology and national counter-histories, as they had for the LMSP, REPOhistory artists began research for *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* by gathering oral histories of people who had lived in the neighbourhood before its destruction. REPOhistory member, Tom Klem recounts it this way: "We were invited by The Atlanta Arts Festival to go back and re-mark Buttermilk Bottom on the sight that it originally existed. After interviewing several residents from that time, I was fixated

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on the idea of putting a face to this place."[285] An early visit to the Atlanta

archives made it clear that archival evidence of Buttermilk Bottom did not exist.[286]

Instead of relying on archives, then, REPOhistory members worked with the

memories of Atlanta residents and pieced together the stories of Buttermilk

Bottom from those. This approach fit well with some of the collective's goals as

drafted after the LMSP, which were numerous and included: "go into

communities", "facilitate for local people" and "strengthen ties with art/community

groups."[287] Sholette's 1992 notes for future projects included: "Get advice from

local historians, folklorists, community members about the kinds of sites and

histories they feel should be included before you ask artists to get involved."[288]

REPOhistory interviewed dozens of past residents of 'the Bottom' and

involved local artists in the project, most notably James Hiram Malone, a

professional artist who had grown up in Buttermilk Bottom and who became a

key contributor to the project, as well as to *Voices of Renewal*. REPOhistory

learned from past residents of the neighbourhood about; local mythology (e.g.

origin stories of the neighbourhood's name); what everyday life had been like in

'the Bottom' and pivotal social roles in the community.[289] Point form notes from

the project team in March 1995 demonstrate a close focus on the particular

details of the neighbourhood, including architecture, events and social dynamics

as well as broader themes emerging out of the history of the neighbourhood.

Notes include references like: "Auburn Ave historicization gap…race vs. class?

i.e, why is Auburn so "full" of official history, while BB is so empty?" and

"Architecture: shotgun, duplex, church, school."[290] The notes recommend that

the project emphasize both the destruction of Buttermilk Bottom and its "genesis

and substance…*while it existed*."[291]

While REPOhistory focused on local particularities in *Entering Buttermilk

Bottom*, however, the collective also immediately contextualized the specific story

of the neighbourhood as a story of racial segregation, a story with national

reverberations. In a letter written to artists joining the project midway

REPOhistory member Neill Bogan writes:

> Why is Buttermilk Bottom Important? Because, like any place, it has a
> story to tell. Because it was so thoroughly removed that its physical signs
> have disappeared and memories of it are beginning to fade. Because it is
> so invisible in the academic history record, yet so visible in the oral record.
> Because its construction, removal, and historical invisibility are all
> products, and perfect crystallizations, of the elaborate American social
> apparatus called segregation.[292]

The collective also contextualized Buttermilk Bottom's story as part of a broader

'urban renewal' project in Atlanta and elsewhere, a project that was both

historical and current. Bogan continues:

> We are going to mark the borders and the interiors of the still-accessible parts
> of the Bottom… We are going to stick to this area and this subject for two
> reasons: 1) The simple details of this complex story will take all of our efforts
> to get across in even a capsulized way. 2) In one way or another, the story
> embodies most of the forces that have created present-day Atlanta.[293]

Entering Buttermilk Bottom was undertaken just prior to the 1996 Olympic

Games in Atlanta, which Atlanta politicians and businesses hoped would put the

city on the map for global tourism.[294] REPOhistory made links between the

displacement of Buttermilk Bottom in the 1960s and the contemporary

displacements as a result of ongoing redevelopment for the Olymics.

REPOhistory notes read:

> [t]he violent "inner city" was constructed through episodes like the life and planned death of Buttermilk Bottom. Current battles over urban services and land use are prefigured in its story. Current and future vision/schemes like Atlanta's Olympic redevelopment plans will have at least one root firmly planted in the graves of areas like the Bottom.[295]

In fact, REPOhistory insisted that the *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* signs remain up for a full year so as to intersect with the Olympics.[296] As I will discuss shortly, some of the signs directly contested Olympic redevelopment.

In the process of creating *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* we can see an outward trajectory from the specific details of a local site, a neighbourhood, to the "bigger picture", the violence of both racism and 'urban renewal'. This trajectory contrasts with the collective's artistic process for the *LMSP,* which began with broad themes and then honed in on local examples to illustrate these themes. While both projects involved amassing a large quantity of historical information and then "winnowing it down"[297], *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* was more akin to an "archaeological approach" to place.[298] Site-specific performance projects that work with this approach start with what currently exists in a site, identify traces of the past in the present and then dig further into narratives of the past from there. This approach focuses on the contemporary experience of place, leading the audience through a kind of discovery or amplified experience of that place. An archaeological approach starts with the present. Pearson offers this definition: '[A] material practice set in the present which works on and with traces of the

past. What archaeologists do is work with evidence in order to create something- a meaning, a narrative, a story- which stands for the past in the present."[299]

REPOhistory's archaeological approach to site-specificity in *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* led to a noticeably different tenor in the project's street signs than that in the *LMSP*. While they were like the *LMSP*'s in that they mimicked official street signs and were installed on street poles, most of the project's signs were, as one Atlanta journalist put it at the time, "enigmatic verbal and graphic snapshots of the area."[300] Many of the signs were personal in tone offering only a snippet of text, in contrast to the LMSP signs. Sign #8 in the series of twenty (artists James Malone and Tom Klem), for example, is taken up almost entirely with an image of a creased and slightly torn black and white photograph of a young black woman in what looks like early twentieth century dress. The text is simple: "Mrs Sarah Lena Echols Malone raised her family on 267 Pine Place Apt #3 in the early thirties." The back of the sign conveys basic details about Malone's life. For example, it informs the viewer that she was a homemaker and a member of "Elder Henry Ingram's Church of God in Christ located on Buchanan Street near Currier Street". Another sign, titled *Wash Lady, Scrub Lady* (#6, artists Tim Arkansaw and REPOhistory) shows a handmade miniature of a woman standing over a large pot and begins with the text: "In the once flourishing Buttermilk Bottom there was a real pillar of the neighbourhood, the wash lady. Her countless laborious chores touched many facets of community life. Scrubbing, washing, boiling clothes, ironing from sun-up to sun-down…" Other signs tell of the corner stores that children bought candy from, African American businesses

like beauty salons, restaurants and pharmacies and the role they played during segregation, the architectural origins of the "double shotgun" houses that had populated Buttermilk Bottom.

More agit-prop signs countered the vernacular and personal tone of most of the signs I've just described. For example, one sign makes clear links between the urban renewal of the past and the upcoming Olympics with a graphic of a wrecking ball smashing into a house and the phrase "now you see it, now you don't" sandwiched by the words "Urban renewal" and "Olympic Redevelopment" (#7, artists Donna Kessinger and Jenny Hoffner). Others display violent archival images of the razing of the neighbourhood ("Cleared for Business", reads one sign). All twenty of the signs in the *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* series bear this text:

> Entering Buttermilk Bottom. Despite harsh conditions imposed by segregation, Buttermilk Bottom was a vibrant community with African-American-run schools, churches and businesses. Its bulldozing under "urban renewal" during the 1960's damaged community structures throughout Atlanta.[301]

This text linked personal and neighbourhood details with the city more broadly and ensured that each image would be read contextually.

Entering Buttermilk Bottom further emphasized the neighbourhood scale and the urban context of the story of Buttermilk Bottom's removal by stenciling old street names on the current pavement, marking the boundaries of Buttermilk Bottom with simple green and white signs (reminiscent of highway signs) that read "Entering Buttermilk Bottom" and, holding a reunion of past residents in the

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parking lot of the Atlanta Civic Center right, where the neighbourhood once stood.[302] As noted earlier, the project coordinators were also very careful to keep the project's sign locations limited to the strict contours of the old neighbourhood, so as to "retain the conceptual strength of site specificity."[303] The site of the Atlanta Civic Center worked particularly well because it was both a clear symbol of urban renewal and was "indisputably the symbolic center of the Bottom"[304] (the local church, for example had stood where the Civic Center now stands). This approach to site-specificity put the project in direct conversation with current urban geography. In the parking lot of the Atlanta Civic Center, REPOhistory artists also painted life-size outlines of houses and stores that used to stand on the site. A photograph of the *Mrs. Sarah Lena Echols Malone* sign in situ shows the personal vernacular of the sign juxtaposed with the impersonal functionality of modern office highrises in the background.[305] Another juxtaposes an old photograph of small wooden cabins against downtown highrises (#8, artist Lisa Maya Knauer). These juxtapositions, like the questions on the LMSP signs, implicate the viewer in the historical violence conveyed, though in this case they implicate the viewer in a local *politics of place*, with national and global reverberations of segregation and violent displacement.

Welcome to Buttermilk Bottom. Eddie Gunderson. Sign #18 in REPOhistory's *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Segregation on the map. Neill Bogan and Irene Ledwith. Sign #17 in REPOhistory's *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Mrs. Sara Lena Echols Malone raised her family on 267 Pine Place Apt. #3 in the early thirties. Tom Klem and James Malone. Sign #8 in REPOhistory's *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Social Engagement in Entering Buttermilk Bottom: Collaboration with 'Sited Communities'

As is already evident from my description of *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*'s artistic

process, this project not only diverged from the *LMSP* in its conception of site-

specificity but also did so in its approach to artistic collaboration, social

engagement and the question of audience. A couple of months prior to the

project exhibition, Knauer wrote:

> This project marks a real breakthrough for REPOhistory. It…represents a
> new level of collaboration. About half the signs will be created by Atlanta
> artists, organized by REPOhistory members George Spencer and Cynthia
> Anderson, now living in Atlanta. Our research has involved dozens of

former neighbourhood residents, who have shared their memories with us. And many local organizations, including churches, schools, and neighbourhood groups, have been involved.[306]

In retrospect, REPOhistory referred to *Buttermilk Bottom* and *Voices of Renewal* as "labs for neighbourhood-based community partnering techniques."[307] Indeed, this project privileged local knowledge and blurred the line between artistic collaborators and audience. The dozens of past residents who contributed their memories to the project were also attendees of the "homecoming picnic", a reunion that REPOhistory hosted on the weekend of the show's opening. REPOhistory member George Spencer wrote after the fact about the reunion: "The subjects and imagery of the signs initiated reminiscences, sparked discussion and participation in the revivification of this place and others that have been lost and almost forgotten."[308]

Not only were ex-residents of the neighbourhood key collaborators on the project but the project also sought to engage current residents of the (still predominantly black) area. REPOhistory members figured that "people who found the 'inner city' scary would not be likely to traipse around a predominantly black neighbourhood" and wanted to "address the residents of the immediate neighborhood, which was witnessing fitful and uneven steps toward further gentrification."[309] Bogan's mid-project notes to incoming artists note that working primarily in a public housing project where many past Buttermilk Bottom residents now lived would ensure engagement.[310] We can see a shift in

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REPOhistory's conception of audience here from a generalized public to a specific one.

The desired outcome of social engagement in *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* also differed from the response the *LMSP* sought to effect. While contemporary literature on socially engaged art practices often pits art that seeks to provoke discomfort against dialogical art, which is characterized as 'open' and seeks to foster mutual understanding between groups,[311] *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* in fact attempted to operate on both of these registers. The project sought to provoke discomfort for audience members now living on or visiting the site of a formerly vibrant neighbourhood that was violently removed. It called social acceptance of the upcoming Olympics into question, forcing viewers to acknowledge the racist history of modern Atlanta and to consider its ramifications in the present. Like the LMSP *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* asked its audience to bear witness to the past and to bear responsibility for the future, based on an "instantaneous shock of insight."[312] At the same time, the project opened up the possibility of increased solidarity amongst former residents of the neighbourhood and the possibility of dialogue and increased understanding between past residents of the Bottom and the rest of Atlanta. As Bogan noted at the time, "stories circulate socially, not geographically—so that one part of a town may never have heard the important stories of another part of town."[313] REPOhistory created the project in a way that would speak to people who had never heard of the Bottom but also so that it was evocative for the people who had grown up

there. Sholette has since noted that, in fact, most journalists in Atlanta had never heard of Buttermilk Bottom before REPOhistory's project.[314]

Entering Buttermilk Bottom indicates both a shift in REPOhistory's conception of audience and a shift in the venue through which engagement was to occur. Engagement in this project included face-to-face dialogue as well as individual reception of site-specific signs. The homecoming reunion was open to everyone. One critic wrote after attending:

> You didn't have to have been a resident of the neighbourhood razed during the urban renewal push of the '60s to enjoy the feeling of community there on the Civic Center plaza, as folks greeted former teachers and reminisced about courting wives and winning the numbers. But it wasn't just the warm spirit of remembrance you missed. This reunion…movingly illustrated an expanded vision of what art can be.[315]

To a certain extent this 'expanded vision of art' was made possible by an existent place-based community. REPOhistory notes indicate that by the 1990s many former Buttermilk Bottom residents lived in one particular housing project and this no doubt helped REPOhistory access the social networks that shaped the project. Had the collective been interested in working with oral history for the LMSP, they would have required a different methodology altogether. Lower Manhattan is a highly mobile site in which neighbours with a common history or deep social relationships are much harder to find.

Art-Historical Lineage #2: 'Community Art'

In contrast to the LMSP, which can be read as a counter-monumental project, *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* bears many of the hallmarks of community art, also known as 'new genre public art',[316] 'community arts', 'community-based art' and, more recently, 'community-engaged art'. Site-specific projects in this genre tend to give profile to the vernacular and strive to foster a deeper sense of social belonging, community or solidarity.[317] Adding "human-scale information….first person testimonies and the artifacts of ordinary lives" to the historical record is a "through-line" in the field[318] and the audience experience is often one in which unique local stories are shared in a spirit of solidarity. In this genre, social engagement is primarily fostered through face-to-face relationships, through storytelling, shared labour or live events. Vernacular culture not only provides the basis for the content of most community art but also is equally reflected aesthetically. Work in this field tends toward popular forms such as storytelling, spoken word, mural-making and culturally-rooted music and dance traditions. As Goldbard puts it in her summary of the field,[319] community artists demonstrate an "expansive willingness to draw on the entire cultural vocabulary of a community, from esoteric crafts to comic books- whatever resonates with community members' desire to achieve full expression."[320] An emphasis on the everyday is also reflected in the sites in which the art is made and exhibited. Community art tends to be exhibited outside of the gallery, often in public or semi-public spaces such as streets, parks, or community centres. At all levels, then, community art strives to move away from elite perspectives, forms and institutions in the name of inclusivity, participation and collaboration.[321]

As *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* did, community art tends to engage with site at a neighbourhood scale. Neighbourhoods or other small-scale areas (e.g. parks, apartment complexes) are treated as "storied places", places layered with vernacular memories. Memories of a place 'as it used to be' and stories of how a place or community has changed over time are treated as valuable and neglected resources. Community art, in fact, very often begins with an interest in fostering pride of place and as a result local characters and local wisdom are recognized and honoured. Work in this genre emerged out of a critique of site-specificity as a practice in which a "museum zone" was imposed onto what had already been a lived-in place.[322] In Suzanne Lacy's anthology *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1994) critic Jeff Kelley argues that new genre public art engages with place, while traditional public art treats place as 'site':

> Places are what fill [sites] out and make them work. Sites are like maps or mines, while places are the reservoirs of human content, like memory or gardens. ... Places are held in sites by personal and common values, and by the maintenance of those values over time, as memory. As remembered, places are thus conserved ... This conservation is at root psychological, and, in a social sense, memorial. But if places are held inside us, they are not solipsistic, since they can be held in common. At a given threshold, our commonly held places become communities.[323]

In keeping with this genre's valuing of the vernacular, memories or impressions of a place as recounted by "everyday people" tend to make up the bulk of the thematic content in site-specific community art projects.

Evaluating Community Art and Entering Buttermilk Bottom

The question of how to evaluate or critique community art has plagued both practitioners and critics. Literature in this field emphasizes the importance of artistic process as much as artistic outcomes. While funders may be interested in quantitative evaluation of artistic processes (how many people were engaged, which demographics and over what length of time) critical practitioners and scholars are concerned with the quality of engagement, focusing on how collaboration produces new knowledge and artistic forms.[324] Advocates of community art celebrate the ways in which work in this field contributes to the reclamation of denigrated or colonized cultural practices, self-representation by marginalized individuals and groups, and a (re)merging of art and everyday life.[325] Some theorist/practitioners make links between community art and popular education practices, arguing that both draw on specific and grounded personal experiences to move toward collective analysis and social change.[326] In the Latin American context, out of which popular education emerged, 'communicación popular' and 'arte popular' are understood as crucial tools with which to stimulate critical analysis and action on behalf of the 'popular' classes, the 'people' (i.e. marginalized populations).[327]

As this genre of practice has become institutionalized and more widely recognized, however, it has also come under increasing fire. Even as some practitioners and theorists value community art for its radical potential (as a form of self-representation, reclamation, etcetera) others have critiqued the genre's emphasis on collaboration between artists and often marginalized publics as a

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form of recolonization, ineffectual charity or an abdication of pressing social

issues such as poverty and racism (a form of social welfare 'lite').[328] Miwon

Kwon's critique of new genre public art's premise of 'community' is especially

worth reviewing here, as Kwon premises her critique on the *Culture in Action*

festival (Chicago, 1991-1993), curated by Mary Jane Jacobs, who was also the

curator who brought REPOhistory to Atlanta for *City Site Works*. As I outline in

the introductory chapter of this dissertation, Kwon critically analyses various

iterations of collaboration "between an artist and a community or audience group"

in new genre public art, arguing that:

> [w]hile many of the goals of new genre public art are salutary… new genre
> public art can exacerbate uneven power relations, remarginalize (even
> colonize) already disenfranchised groups, depoliticise and remythify the
> artistic process, and finally further the separation of art and life (despite
> claims to the contrary).[329]

Kwon critiques community art premised on the assumption that people who live

in proximity to each other are already a formed community and is critical of the

symptomatic desire in this field to ensure that people "see and recognize

themselves in the work, not so much in the sense of being critically implicated but

of being affirmatively pictured or validated."[330] In this genre, Kwon argues,

discursive representations created by artists and institutions (with varying levels

of input from the groups they claim to engage) are reified as "expressions" of

cohesive, unified communities.[331] While the work is presented as a collaboration

between artists and "those who occupy a given site,"[332] themes and formal

approach are often pre-determined by partnering institutions, leaving the so-

called communities who participate in the artistic process to "perform a relatively

incidental role."[333] In other words, work in this field can reify damaging discursive frames of a site and its associated 'communities' even as it claims to give voice to marginalized publics.[334]

Indeed, many analyses of work in this genre have come down to questions of participation.[335] To what extent is participation co-opted in these processes? Are participants marshaled to contribute to the work but kept out of key authorial decisions? Who has agency and how? Are there unspoken exclusions? How are structural inequities like race, class and gender navigated in the artistic process?

Art historian Claire Bishop, however, (who is now also widely cited for her critiques of community art) takes issue with the focus on participation in both community art practice and discourse. In fact, Bishop is critical of work in this genre for a number of reasons. She argues that community art is premised on a renunciation of authorship on the part of the artist and that this renunciation is damaging in that it both produces art that is neither interesting as art nor effectual as a form of social change.[336] Pretenses of equal participation in artistic processes, Bishop argues, can paper over structural inequities in the real world.[337] Bishop also critiques this genre for its search for social consensus or commonalities through dialogue. In focusing on "the creative rewards of collaborative activity", Bishop argues, community art practices avoid conflictual, difficult or troubling dynamics. Bishop appreciates art that "draws attention to the contradictions of political discourse" embodying tensions, rather than seeking to reduce or eliminate them.[338] Writing primarily about community art as it has been

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taken up in Britain, Bishop views this genre as a form of collusion with forces responsible for dismantling the welfare state (i.e. art is offered in place of meaningful material redistribution).[339] Critiques by Kwon, Bishop and others have prompted many contemporary socially engaged artists to distance themselves from this lineage of practice. Much of today's literature on socially engaged art is quick to distinguish between new 'social practice' and community art which, in reference to critiques like Kwon's, is framed as retrograde and suspicious politically, ethically and artistically.[340]

Which criteria for critical analysis of community art are useful in the case of *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* and how does *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* challenge the criteria as it is currently articulated? REPOhistory's focus on collaboration with what Kwon calls a "sited community" certainly fit with Mary Jane Jacobs signature curating approach, in which artists collaborate with specific, usually marginalized, groups on a project of social relevance.[341] This project, however, troubles easy dismissals of community art practices as premised on a search for social consensus. *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* drew on the vernacular and personal but was also explicitly political and provocative. It was both antagonistic (in that it clearly named powerful forces, wasn't afraid of taking sides and produced discomfort) and it brought people together in a social sphere, telling their stories. As REPOhistory member Lisa Maya Knauer put it, the intent of the project was "non-nostalgic…It was a harsh community, and it existed as a result of segregation."[342] *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* did not bring people together under some false assumption of a harmonious pre-existing

community. Like the LMSP it did not seek to heal a wound but rather sought to

mark a site of social violence. Social engagement in this project was conceived

as *both* provocation of unease and as strengthening of social networks. In fact,

even as the reunion picnic was described as celebratory, Knauer also

remembers that: "People stood up and "testified", argued over the neighbourhood

boundaries and grilled us about our methodology and intentions. One woman

read her eviction letter from 30 years before."[343]

REPOhistory's work with Atlanta residents in this project also challenges

assumptions about collaboration in this genre. While Bishop has argued that new

genre public art practices "are less interested in a relational *aesthetic* than in the

creative rewards of collaborative activity,"[344] collaboration in *Entering Buttermilk*

Bottom was (at least partially) born out of necessity. Certainly, it does seem that,

after the LMSP, REPOhistory was interested in extending their collaborative work

to involve people beyond their social circles (involving women and more people

of colour was also one of the collective's goals). But it is also clear that ex-

residents of Buttermilk Bottom were invited to collaborate on the project because

archival evidence of the neighbourhood simply didn't exist. Unlike some

community art in which "the making of the event *is* the event"[345] this project (like

REPOhistory's other work) was very much focused on the production of a final

artistic outcome. Participants were framed as knowledgeable agents rather than

as recipients of social service repackaged as art (as Bishop would have it). While

it is true that individual and social transformation were the goals of this project,

transformation through engagement in the artistic process was not

REPOhistory's focus. The project, rather, addressed residents as experts and framed the publics who had never heard of Buttermilk Bottom as the people in need of transformation. Ultimately, of course, only REPOhistory members know all of the spoken and unspoken motivations for their collaboration with Atlanta residents in this project. Did they hope, for example, that such collaboration would lend credibility or 'authenticity' to the work? Possibly. But the fact that REPOhistory collaborated primarily in order to get an accurate sense of what the neighbourhood had been like is important to note.

Nor did REPOhistory approach artistic collaboration with the political naïveté that critics of this genre often assume. Knauer notes after the fact that REPOhistory was aware of its relative privilege in terms of "access to funding agencies and other institutional structures" when working with Atlanta residents and Bogan reveals an awareness of the complexities of authorial control in collective work by stating REPOhistory's approach clearly in his letter to incoming artists:

> The coordinators of each project …have authority (because the group has given them the privilege of working their brains out)….We got you involved as soon as we could; decisions had to made before you got here. They've been made largely by people in New York, not Atlanta. This is far from ideal, but I think if you plug into the design that we've created thus far, you'll find that there are plenty of things left for you to have a role in deciding.[346]

This very clear articulation of REPOhistory's approach to collaboration belies Bishop's assumption that community art is inevitably premised on authorial renunciation and attempts to embody some idealized form of direct democracy.

In fact, while 'outsider' artists are often (justifiably) viewed suspiciously and scholars like Kwon and Foster have questioned socially engaged practices in which artists from elsewhere arrive to work with a place-based 'community' all indications are that in this project REPOhistory approached the publics they engaged respectfully and were appreciated for their efforts. An Atlanta artist who collaborated with REPOhistory, producing one of the 20 signs for *Entering Buttermilk Bottom*, was quoted in the press as saying that he was untroubled by the fact that REPOhistory was a New York-based collective: "A lot folks want to forget about these communities…the stuff they presented to me was new stuff, and I've been here all my life."[347] Local art critics glowed about *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* even as they disparaged the rest of the *City Site Works* exhibitions, many of which also relied heavily on community engagement.[348] And public comments in a guestbook now housed in the archives also indicate that this project was better received than the other exhibitions in the festival (for which there are a number of critical comments). The guestbook comments for *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* were all positive. Some examples are:

- "Buttermilk Bottom is where I was born and raised until the age of 6. I think it is great that someone wanted to dig up some forgotten history. A Salaam A Alakim."

- "It has been a privilege to work with all of you on this project to help the people of Atlanta remember their community"

- "I rented an apartment at McGill Park and always wondered what was there before McGill Park Condos. This exhibit made me feel sad at the loss of a community at the expense of greed. Ironically, current renters there are being "displaced" for Olympic renters/money."

- "…Posters- are they available to community groups? [I] would like to help spread them in D… County…"[349]

These comments suggest that both old residents of 'the Bottom' and new residents living where the Bottom once stood found the project evocative and informative. They also suggests that the project was appreciated both for its artistic process and for its final exhibition. The fact that the Buttermilk Bottom reunion initiated by REPOhistory was subsequently taken up as an annual event is also notable, as is REPOhistory's continued collaboration with residents of Atlanta's old fourth ward a year later for *Voices of Renewal* (1997).[350]

An unresolved question about this project is the extent to which *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* succeeded as the form of critical provocation it aspired to be. While the project appears to have fostered local solidarities, it is unclear whether REPOhistory's attempt to contribute to local anti-gentrification or anti-development politics by situating the story of one past neighbourhood within the 'bigger pictures' of modern city building and race-based segregation in this project were successful. The extent to which the project succeeded in provoking unease about the past and consequent responsibility for the present and future of the city remains unclear. It is possible that, despite its attempts at provocation, this project succeeded more in fostering solidarity and local relationships than in provoking critical discomfort.

Placing City Politics? *Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City*

The third and final REPOhistory project I analyze in terms of site-specificity and social engagement is *Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City*

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(1998). *Civil Disturbances* was the last of REPOhistory's site-specific sign

projects and focused on legal struggles "waged by public interest lawyers and

activists in NYC" that "sought to extend rights guaranteed by America's

Constitution and laws to all sectors of society."[351] The project was undertaken in

partnership with a group called New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and

represented a renewed focus on New York City for REPOhistory (who had, in the

meantime worked again in Atlanta and then in Houston, Texas). The project

culminated in the production of twenty street signs, which were exhibited

throughout the city. As I will show, in contrast to the *LMSP* and *Entering*

Buttermilk Bottom, *Civil Disturbances* neither employed New York's cityscape as

a place for politics, nor engaged primarily with place at a neighbourhood scale

but, rather, specifically named and *placed* contentious urban political issues,

provoking wrath from New York's municipal administration and causing

significant public controversy.

Site-Specificity in Civil Disturbances

New York was undergoing rapid change as REPOhistory worked together

through the 1990s. Manhattan was quickly gentrifying, leading to intensified

battles over both housing and public space.[352] Rudolph ('Rudy') Giuliani was

elected mayor of New York City in 1994 and his administration accelerated these

changes. Giuliani initiated a campaign of sweeping the city's streets of

'undesirables' (establishing a "zero tolerance policy" for petty crimes like graffiti

and panhandling) and established an unprecedented police presence in the city.

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Geographer Neil Smith has argued that Giuliani's tenure signaled the emergence of the 'revanchist city' (a model that is not unique to New York). The revanchist city is driven by "a broad, vengeful right-wing reaction against both the "liberalism" of the 1960s and 1970s and the predations of capital"[353] and is characterized by the securitization of public space and attacks by the elite on 'minority' groups (people of colour, women, gays, the homeless, environmentalists) in the name of 'reclaiming' the city for the 'public' and restoring moral order.[354]

While urban changes had been on the radar for many REPOhistory members in their previous anti-gentrification work together as PAD/D, it is no surprise that as the 1990s wore on REPOhistory members became increasingly interested in artistic interventions focused on the city itself. Meeting notes from 1995 identify REPOhistory as "really the only active art-making collective in town" and query the "responsibilities that that entails," noting a "disappearance of 'alternative spaces.'"[355] New project ideas at the end of 1995 included focusing on detention centers around the city and contesting public/private space in response to "Business Improvement Districts."[356]

In the spring of 1996 REPOhistory was approached by New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) to collaborate on a sign project that would highlight the importance of public interest law in protecting the rights of marginalized groups. Sholette, who published a chronology of the *Civil Disturbances* project in 2004, says that the collective entered into the partnership with NYLPI once it was made clear that REPOhistory would retain authorial

control of the project.[357] REPOhistory member Mark O'Brien, who himself worked in law, agreed to coordinate the project.[358] The plan was to produce 24 site-specific signs highlighting 'landmark' legal victories for disenfranchised groups. After consultation with public interest organizations and public interest lawyers throughout the city NYPLI amassed a list of thirty cases for REPOhistory to consider for the project. In the end REPOhistory chose nine of the cases recommended by NYPLI, gleaning the other eleven for what became a twenty sign set from suggestions by REPOhistory members and affiliated artists.[359] REPOhistory worked closely with lawyers and, in some cases, relevant community organizations to develop the content for each sign. The signs addressed a diversity of social issues including gentrification, privatization, disability rights, gender discrimination, access to healthcare, housing, and police violence.

As is partially indicated by the themes I've just listed, this project focused from the onset as much on an urban scale as a national one. During the process of working on *Civil Disturbances,* collective member Neill Bogan wrote that the project would "track… the systems that are creating the 21st-century metropolis through the legal conflicts that mark their paths."[360] A project description written in 1997 states that:

> The *Civil Disturbances* "image bites" will encourage the viewer to consider how the daily lives of individuals and communities have been affected by the social, legal and political issues depicted in each sign. They will invite the viewer to explore and find a connection between political, legal and grassroots community strategies for securing social change.[361]

While some of the legal cases represented in the signs had national significance (e.g. a sign commemorating *Brown vs. Board of Education* by artist Laurie Ourlicht)*, most of them focused on legal battles with City departments, the City's administration or powerful developers in the city. In Stephanie Basch's *Making Domestic Violence a Police Priority: Bruno V. Codd* (#1 in the series), text describing a class action suit against the New York City Police Department is overlaid on a black and white image of the stately columns of the courthouse. *Homeless Families Fight for a Right to Shelter: McCain v. Koch* (#11, artists Mark O'Brien and Kit Warren) tells the story of how Legal Aid successfully sued the City for failing to provide shelter for families that met with "minimum standards of habitability" prompting new law. The text also claims that between 1987 (the year the case was won) and 1998 (the year of the *Civil Disturbances* exhibition) the City had "vigorously resist[ed] efforts to enforce compliance" of the new law. *Chinese Staff and Workers Association v. City of New York* (#10, artist Ming-Mur Ray) tells the story of how "a coalition of Chinatown residents and community organizations went to court to stop the construction of Henry Street Tower, a 21-story high-rise luxury condominium," seen as a harbinger of gentrification. Another sign documents a 1982 legal victory for women struggling to gain entry to the New York Fire Department as firefighters (#15, Susan Schuppli). All of these signs took up urban issues in which New York residents and the City's administration were pitted as adversaries. The two *Civil Disturbance* signs that elicited the most response, which I will describe in detail shortly, also did this, one of them addressing police brutality and the other discrimination in public

housing. All of the signs in the series had common text at the bottom, which contextualized the individual legal cases.

The *Civil Disturbances* signs were first shown publicly on May 1, 1998 ("Law Day") at a gathering that included mayor Giuliani and a number of city judges.[362] At this point REPOhistory was waiting for a permit from the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) to temporarily install the signs. A contact in the NYCDOT had helped them secure the same permit for *LMSP* and their 1994 project *Queer Spaces*.[363] For *Civil Disturbances* the collective had decided to double print their signs and exhibit them both as a set in the courthouse area of Manhattan and site-specifically (individually) throughout the boroughs of Manhattan, The Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn. This approach allowed the project to be accessed in total in one discrete location but also to resonate at sites of events that "precipitated the cases represented, sites where the effects of these legal cases were felt and sites where significant characters in the legal struggles depicted lived, worked or struggled."[364] REPOhistory had organized a press conference and opening tours of the signs for May 19, 1998 on assurance from the NYCDOT that the permits would soon arrive.[365]

On May 19th itself, just minutes before REPOhistory was to open the exhibit, the collective received notice that their exhibition permits for *Civil Disturbances* had been denied. The City administration claimed that the NYCDOT should never have allowed any signs other than traffic signs to be posted in the past.[366] REPOhistory immediately countered by sending out a press release challenging the right of the city to censor the project. "How ironic",

it reads, "that on the day we're supposed to be celebrating the victories of New Yorkers who fought to protect our civil rights, we're having to battle our own."[367] This injunction was particularly ironic as one of the signs set to be installed (*Art in the Street- A First Amendment Right: Bery v. City of New York*, by artists George Spencer and Cynthia Liesenfeld) explicitly focused on a recent legal case in which street artists had won the right to artistic freedom of speech.[368]

As is obvious given the theme of *Civil Disturbances,* by this point REPOhistory had significant access to the legal community and the collective was quickly offered legal representation in order to procure permits for the exhibition. General counsel for New York Lawyers for the Public Interest told the press: You don't change the rules in the middle of the game in the First Amendment… Having opened this up as a forum before, it seems to me they should not be allowed to say it's closed just because in this instance they seem not to like the speech".[369] REPOhistory members debated suing the City but decided that in the end their priority was to get the signs up and to focus on the original theme of the project. Under significant legal pressure, three months later, the City reversed its decision to withhold the permits and granted REPOhistory a temporary (one year) permit to install the signs. REPOhistory sent out a press release on August 4, which connected the struggle to get the signs up to the theme of the exhibit:

> We're glad that in the end we didn't have to take the City to court. But what would have happened if we didn't have strong legal representation? Or course, that's exactly what CIVIL DISTURBANCES is about —the importance of guaranteeing all New Yorkers, especially the poor and disenfranchised, access to justice within the legal system.[370]

O'brien stated in the press release: "These cases have shaped the fabric of life in New York City as much as the streets on which we walk and the buildings in which we live and work…We wanted to bring the stories behind them into the physical landscape of the City."[371] The *Civil Disturbances* signs were installed in August 1998 both near the courthouse and site-specifically, as planned.

Social Engagement in Civil Disturbances

After their installation the *Civil Disturbances* signs continued to cause controversy. A sign in front of the Empire State Building (Janet Koenig's *Disabled in Action v. Empire State Building*), which documented a lawsuit forcing the Empire State building to comply with nation-wide accessibility laws, went missing shortly after its installation. When REPOhistory members replaced the sign they were told by a security guard that he would continue to remove it. Sure enough it disappeared again despite the fact that the building managers had a surveillance camera focused on it.[372] Another sign, this one in front of a luxury hotel, also went missing. The sign told the story of the illegal removal of four hotels occupied by low-income residents to make way for development on the site where the hotel now stood. Representatives of the Millennium hotel claimed that a permit for the sign had not been verified. The hotel threatened to sue REPOhistory if the sign was put back up but the collective did so anyway (the sign remained up for the full year allowed by the permit).[373]

Two other signs became the object of more public struggles. Artist Marina Gutierrez's sign documented an ongoing dispute over discriminatory housing

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quotas. The sign read: "Since the 1960s, the NYC Housing Authority and other subsidized housing in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, have used quotas to insure that up to 75% of tenants were Hasidic, even though white families make up less than 10% of the waiting list." The case had been in litigation for over 10 years by 1998, first by Brooklyn Legal Services and then by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund.[374] The text was accompanied by a black and white graphic of a house divided into quarters, three of which were filled with white bodies and one of which was filled with black bodies. Within two days of the sign's installation it was removed by the Housing Authority. Offended by the sign, some tenants had mobilized enough to persuade the NYCDOT (who had issued the permit for it) to remove it. In fact, by the time they arrived to do so it had already been taken down by the legal department of the Housing Authority.[375] In response to claims that the sign would provoke anti-Semitic violence, the lawyer who had first alerted REPOhistory to the issue, Marty Needelman (himself a Jew) told the press that while he, too, could see it could "evoke anti-Semitic images" the sign was factually correct and indicated an important social issue.[376] REPOhistory put the sign back up down the block from where it had initially been installed in an apparently "less sensitive" spot. The sign was taken down a second time by the NYCDOT. This prompted a rally, co-organized by NYLPI, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Southside Fair Housing Committee and REPOhistory. Posters for the rally (produced in both Spanish and English) read:

> Help put back the sign that NYCHA tried to suppress! Defend free speech and the right to fair housing in Williamsburg's Projects….Show community

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support for the legal case to find NYCHA in contempt of court for more than 20 years of housing discrimination against the Latino and Black residents of Williamsburg![377]

A press release for the "reinstallation ceremony" reads:

> As artists and as citizens we believe that these histories, as well as the sometimes contentious debates that accompany them, belong to the common, public spaces of our city. It is a discussion often filled with conflict and contradiction, yet we contend that artists and intellectuals have a unique stake in this unfinished public dialogue.[378]

The sign was reinstalled at the event and, according to Sholette, remained up well beyond the year-long permit.[379]

The other sign that elicited significant public response focused on legal struggles over police brutality resulting in death. This provocative sign by artists Jenny Polak and David Thorne was developed in consultation with a group called Parents Against Police Brutality, members of which had lost children to police violence. Polak and Thorne contacted REPOhistory proposing a sign on the topic of police brutality for *Civil Disturbances* and opted to make a sign featuring the names and photographs of three teenagers unjustifiably killed by police in separate incidences. One had hit a police car with a football during a street game, another's toy gun was mistaken for a real gun and the third was shot in the back for holding a machete.[380] Front and center on the sign, in red letters was the word "¡Presente!" surrounded by a collage of photographs of the boys who were killed. The artists' use of "!Presente!" referenced *Parents Against Police Brutality*'s practice of calling out this word in response to a roll-call of names of the dead at each meeting and was also used to emphasize that the crimes of the

police (and opposition to them) were now present in public space.[381] The back of the sign made by Polak and Thorne reads: "desaparecido?" in bold letters. Overlaid on another collage of photographs (all of people of colour, presumably killed by police), is this text:

> From 1994-1996 75 people were killed (shot in the back, shot in the head, pinned face down and shot choked, hogtied and crushed, beaten to death etc.) by New York City police officers…Only 3 officers were convicted of committing any crimes, 0 for murder.

Unlike the rest of the signs in *Civil Disturbances*, Polak and Thorne's sign was printed four times and REPOhistory installed the signs in front of the homes of the three families of the teenagers featured, at their request. Before installation of these signs, when REPOhistory was first denied their permit, the parents Polak and Thorne had worked with spoke out about the importance of the exhibit. Iris Baez, the mother of Anthony Baez told the press: "It's going to be in their face, and that's why the city don't want it… We deal with reality. That's what has to come out. Things can be all pink on the outside, but it's murder on the inside."[382] When the signs were eventually installed another parent of a boy killed by police, Nicholas Heyward Sr., said: "I'm just so happy its finally going up."[383] After the *Civil Disturbances* permit ended, Heyward informed REPOhistory that the sign commemorating his son's death had been knocked down (he thought by police) but that he had reclaimed it. According to Polak:

> [Heyward] rescued it and we decided to rededicate it. At the time he was still living right there. I tried to make a bit of an occasion of it. Tom came to bring the spare sign, and a poet [Samantha Coerbell], did an intense poem she'd written about the killing which she came and performed on the street to a couple of people including Nicholas senior, and a local reporter

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I got hold of. I think the continued activism of Nicholas, his taking ownership of the sign, and the way people around here feel about the police all may have helped keep it there.[384]

As of 2008, the sign was still up on site in Brooklyn.[385] Parents Against Police Brutality continues to organize and an annual memorial for Nicholas Heyward Jr. is held every year at the same site, where there is also a mural of Heyward.[386]

Installing *Who Watches the Police?* Jenny Polak and David Thorne. Sign #14 in REPOhistory's C*ivil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Who Watches the Police? Jenny Polak and David Thorne. Sign #14 in REPOhistory's C*ivil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

Ending Discrimination in Public Housing. Marina Gutierrez. Sign #4 in REPOhistory's *Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.
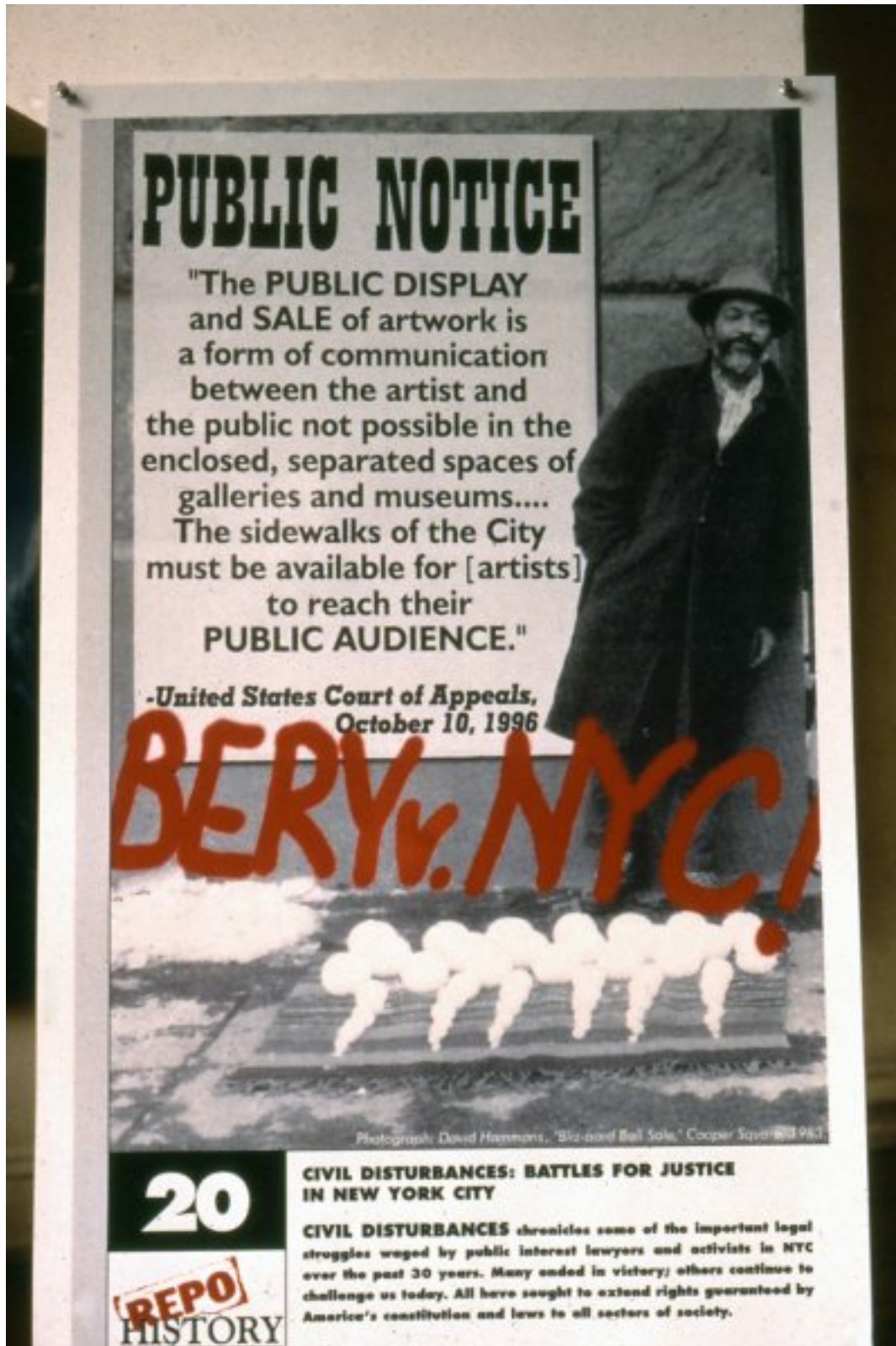
Art in the Street- A First Amendment Right Beryl vs. City of New York. George Spencer and Cynthia Leisenfeld. Sign #20 in REPOhistory's *Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City*. Courtesy of REPOhistory.

While *Civil Disturbances* clearly led to significantly more public agitation than the LMSP had, REPOhistory had articulated the intended audience for this project in much the same way they had for the LMSP. The audience was conceived very broadly as "New Yorkers" and the collective estimated that more than 10 000 potential jurors and more than 100 000 people involved in the law more broadly would see the signs in the courthouse area over the course of a year.[387] In a draft press release, REPOhistory offered some walking tours to jurors, who would get a chance to speak with plaintiffs and legal representatives involved in the cases the signs presented.[388] This was planned for the opening, much like the *LMSP*'s parade. More generally, the collective claimed that the project would:

> reach and inform a variety of audiences about how the law infuses all social strata and how everyone benefits from the vindication of constitutional and statutory rights; help to counter public apathy towards both political and legal attacks on the poor and disadvantaged; develop broader public support for Legal Services and public interest law groups that put into practice our nation's ideal of providing equal access to our justice system.[389]

This statement makes clear that not only was the question of audience similarly conceived in *Civil Disturbances*, so too was the nature of the social engagement. As in the *LMSP*, REPOhistory's intent in this project was to educate and to provoke public dialogue.

The choice, however, to directly mark the sites of contentious and ongoing urban issues made this project inflammatory. *Civil Disturbances* directly pointed at conflict between marginalized sectors of the public and the City administration

that was supposed to support and represent them. As REPOhistory member

Tom Klem put it: "We were attacking injustices created by the city government

who we were seeking permission from. Many of the signs mentioned the Mayor

by name."[390] This proved too much for the current administration. Not only did the

City respond by trying to prevent the exhibition of the *Civil Disturbances* signs but

they also passed a bylaw disallowing any public art on lamposts shortly after the

project.[391] Sholette says that some New York artists blamed REPOhistory for

this.[392]

To a certain extent, REPOhistory had anticipated an antagonistic

response to *Civil Disturbances*, upping their own rhetoric in advance of the

project. A press release draft from March 1998 (before the City withheld its

permits) reads: "When New York's famed REPOhistory group unwraps it

dramatic, new CIVIL DISTURBANCES project at the State Supreme Court

Building at Foley Square…there's bound to be some squawking at City Hall."[393]

Nonetheless, the collective did not anticipate some of the ways in which the

project played out and they provide valuable insight into site-specific

engagement.

Art-Historical Lineage #3: Urban Interventionist Art
While *Civil Disturbances* could be considered a counter-monumental project like

the *LMSP*, its involvement with urban politics makes it more closely aligned to

urban interventionist art, another lineage in the genealogy of site-specific socially

engaged art today. As I discussed in my Introduction to this dissertation, a

number of factors have prompted a rise in an artistic practices that take on 'the city' as a site. Urbanization, urban displacements, gentrification and creative city policies have all prompted work in this genre, as have urban polarization and social alienation, shrinking public space and a desire for more 'liveable' cities. In response to these factors, urban interventionist art has proliferated in recent years, representing a wide spectrum of political positions and artistic forms. Some interventions celebrate unique aspects of the city such as ecological features or historical landmarks but many are more explicitly politicized, creating "urban counter images"[394] in order to contest the violence, environmental degradation or exploitation upon which the city depends.[395] These interventions take the form of memory walks, soundwalks, site-specific dance, scripted suggestions for public behaviour, guided tours, dérive, counter-cartography and, embedded works in city spaces, such as locative media. We also see a proliferation of found objects placed in city spaces, such as natural materials like driftwood or plants. Many of these interventions emphasize the intersection of nature and culture in the city, highlighting an ecological feature with graffiti or human constructions, like fences, with newly planted shrubs or flowers.

Urban art interventions take up site-specificity in order to investigate and expose the city as a cultural construction, highly produced and ultimately changeable. These art practices are interested in the cracks in the city, illuminating the ways in which the cityscape masks power or ideology.[396] Influenced by the Situationists, 1960s Happenings and activist art practices, urban art interventions often merge visual art and theatre, taking the form of site-

specific performance. Many emphasize the phenomenological experience of the performer/spectator as he or she moves through space.[397] All of them suggest the permeability of the city, rendering "familiar places unfamiliar."[398]

In this genre of site-specificity, social engagement is usually elicited through individual encounters with objects or narratives, though there are also some practices that foster group play or collective exploration (pillow fights in public spaces and late night walking groups for example). In many instances of site-specific performance the audience is "accidental".[399] People stumble across the work and may or may not read it as performance. This means that the "audience need not be categorized, or even consider themselves, as an 'audience', as a collective with common attributes."[400] Site-specific performance is also, however, increasingly commissioned in the context of international and city-wide festivals.[401] This creates an intentional audience as well as an accidental audience.[402] The intentional audience may or may not be familiar with the place the work responds to. For the most part contemporary site-specific performance attempts to eliminate the boundary between spectator and performer, perhaps reflecting the desire to explore how 'everyday life' and 'everyday places' are both performed and performative. Through the performance, audience members may become urban explorers, flâneurs, dérivists, nomads or field workers.[403] They may take on the role of witness or be key players in the action that unfolds.[404] Doherty argues that there has been a widespread move in site-specific work from an "expositional" to a "relational"

mode.[405] Urban art interventions are less explicitly pedagogical than community art or counter-monumental art. The public is not necessarily engaged in order to produce a desired result (justice in the case of counter-monuments, sometimes a pride of place or harmonious co-existence in the case of community art). If a community is referenced or drawn upon, it is usually the temporary community created by the work.

Evaluating Urban Interventions and Civil Disturbances
Literature on urban interventionist art tends to focus on its disruption of the city as spectacle. Curator Claire Doherty claims that urban site-specific projects "shatter the fictions of a stable sense of place… intervene in the status quo and literally shift the ground beneath your feet."[406] Site-specific performance theorist and practitioner, Kathleen Irwin, suggests that more and more site-specific performances seek out "transgressive locations" and underscore "displacement, dislocation, homelessness, and disenfranchisement,"[407] implying increasing criticality in the field. Geographer David Pinder focuses on how this work "temporarily transform[s], re-map[s] or reveal[s] [the city] in some new way."[408]

Urban interventionist art is often evaluated in relation to the city as spectacle. To what extent do these practices rupture the spectacle of the city? To what extent do they contribute to it? And for whom the rupture is relevant?[409] These are key questions that can only really be evaluated contextually. Site-specific work can participate in marketing a city as a desirable or unique experience, and large performance festivals are often funded with this intention.

But even work produced for these festivals can challenge dominant perceptions of place and can disrupt such marketing.[410] This is a tension in the field, discussed as much by critical geographers as art theorists.[411]

This genre has also been critiqued for its assumption of privileged bodies: male, able-bodied, colonial, and financially comfortable. The roles which Pearson suggests can be taken up in site-specific performance include the flâneur, dérivist, tourist and rambler.[412] These roles assume freedom of movement, a sense of safety in public space, and the luxury of time. Referencing Doreen Massey's critique of the flâneur's maleness and colonial gaze, Levin and Solga write:

> For many citizens, wandering the city can be a tall order indeed: those whose job or family commitments don't permit weeknight, or even weekend, excursions; those who live in the suburbs or exurbs without a car or without convenient links to public transit; those with physical disabilities; the homeless or dispossessed; women.[413]

As Levin and Solga suggest, urban art interventions tend to remain in the core of the cities, partially at the prompting of festivals, biennials and arts commissioners. And, while there have of course been feminist art interventions, a lot of work in this field assumes a general public that is in fact very specifically classed, racialized and gendered.

Finally, like counter-monuments, urban art interventions beg questions regarding individual reception of artworks and the extent to which the revelations they supposedly produce in fact foster change. Kester, for example, is scathing about a model in which "artists wander from site to site to expose the

contingency of meaning"[414] and this model was part of the motivation for Kwon's

critique of site-specificity that visits "one place after another."

There are three notable lessons regarding the relationship between site-

specificity and social engagement to be learned from how public response to

Civil Disturbances unfolded. These are relevant to analysis of contemporary

urban art interventions. The first important point is that, while provocation was the

goal in *Civil Disturbances*, this project in fact contributed to the maintenance of

social solidarities as much as it provoked new audiences. Gutierrez's sign in

Williamsburg and Polak and Thorne's signs about police brutality became rallying

points for already-existent social movements, who used the signs to further

profile their struggles. Sholette has said that for REPOhistory "history was merely

a critical tool for addressing contemporary issues of social justice."[415] However, it

seems that, without already-existent social networks to further dialogue, most of

REPOhistory's signs were received individually by passersby and therefore,

while they may have altered individual consciousness, could only contribute in a

limited way to the kind of change they aspired to contribute to. The signs that

'came alive', in the sense that they did contribute to ongoing debate and

gatherings were developed in consultation with already organized groups who

could then continue to support and fight for their existence. In *The One and the*

Many, Kester claims that in contemporary collaborative projects like Park Fiction,

Ala Plastica and Dialogue "the artists take on a strategic relationship to political

collectivities currently in formation."[416] While not all of *Civil Disturbances*

exemplified this approach, it appears that the artists that did this in the project sparked the most dialogue and action.

A second interesting lesson to be gleaned from *Civil Disturbances* is that the signs that were most intensely taken up were both hyperlocally site-specific (marking the exact site where housing discrimination was experienced and the *homes* of parents who had lost children to police killings) and spoke to broader urban issues that were already contemporary "nerve-endings". Both of these signs were interscalar, in that they addressed ongoing racism in America, tapped into city-wide contentious issues, and directly marked local sites of violence. It seems that these signs were successfully provocative at all scales because they were developed in conscious alliance with community organizers and represented contemporary struggles.

The third notable lesson from *Civil Disturbances* is that by the late 1990s politically charged site-specific art in New York became as much about the right to public space as it was about its original theme. By provocatively placing urban issues in the cityscape, *Civil Disturbances* acted as a litmus test for artistic freedom under Giuliani's administration. The collective had to struggle to keep its original theme from being subsumed altogether by the issue of public space (recall the group's decision not to sue the City but, rather, to focus on getting the signs up) and the press REPOhistory received focused primarily on conflicts over the very presence of the signs rather than their content per se.[417] This project belied the 'publicness' of public art, showing that only public art that contributed to profitable development and the maintenance of New York's image as

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sufficiently neutralized was welcome by those in power.[418] Sholette claims that REPOhistory's work was the last critical public art in New York and that the possibility of exhibiting critical art in the city's streets has since been foreclosed. While this may be an overstatement, it is indeed worth noting the difficulty of exhibiting or performing any urban art intervention that directly confronts power in the contemporary city. Projects that are not hosted by festivals or other institutions able to secure permits invariably become as much about the struggle for public space as their original theme. In other words, their placement in city space contests urban politics as usual.

Conclusion

There are a number of lessons to be learned from close analysis of the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project*, *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* and *Civil Disturbances*. First, these projects illuminate the range of scales at which critical site-specificity can be taken up in urban contexts. Site-specific work can contest global and national narratives, urban narratives or neighbourhood narratives. While REPOhistory's work functioned simultaneously at all three scales, each project foregrounded one of these scales and the choice of scale in each case had critical implications. There appears to be symptomatic relationships between the scale at which site-specificity functions and how social engagement is conceived in different genres of socially engaged art. Counter-monumental traditions, which take up national symbols, histories and narratives tend to conceive of their public in a generalized way, rather than address specific publics. New genre public art often contests place at a neigbourhood scale and therefore usually conceives of its audience

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more specifically, as it also works to build face-to-face relationships. Urban interventionist art is premised on city-wide issues and narratives and also conceives of its public broadly but may tap into existing relationships and social movements.

Analysis of these three REPOhistory projects both provides a genealogy of site-specific art undertaken in order to foster progressive social change and troubles easy distinctions between genres. Each of REPOhistory's projects focused on a particular scale but was also interscalar. Each of the projects tended toward a particular conception of social engagement but also embodied other approaches. It is interesting to note that REPOhistory members have cited differences in artistic lineage as a reason why the collective eventually disbanded. Neill Bogan says that, while REPOhistory's work "started out as resolutely critical/activist":

> as the group began to concentrate on a low-cost, flexible street-sign format that initially allowed for individual expression for artists within a group framework, it discovered that the format was also ideal for giving voice to unheard "community narratives." A portion of the group's work became "community-based." However, this portion was still often competing with activist/critical elements and projects. Over time, the difficulty in sorting these elements out along lines of interest led to the group's decision to split up, allowing its members to go in a number of different directions."[419]

Sholette too, talks about "the gap that existed between those "*REPOhistorians*" who identified their work as critical and interventionist, and those interested in using culture to expand or reinforce the cohesion of certain communities."[420] In the early days of the collective's work, he says, these rifts remained below the surface but they became more visible as time passed. Sholette adds, however,

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that the different forms of socially engaged practice at work in REPOhistory "produced a subtle, generally productive creative tension."[421] The *Lower Manhattan Sign Project, Entering Buttermilk Bottom,* and *Civil Disturbances* show, in fact, that hasty dismissal of any one genre of site-specific social engagement is unfounded. Instead, close consideration of context is necessary in any analysis, as different contexts spark or nurture different forms of engagement.

At the same time, since socially engaged art today represents a blurring of artistic lineages, awareness of the differences between lineages and the grounds upon which they have been critiqued allows for a more informed analysis of today's practices. Counter-monuments, for example, can be subsumed into the spectacle of the city, contributing to heritage marketing and failing to spark debate even as they tell critical stories. The provocative potential of community art, even when it takes up disturbing histories, can be lost in a reification of face-to-face engagement. Urban interventionist art, which engages with the city as a frame, may spark debates but relies on already-existent social movements to contribute to lasting dialogue and social change. Work in this genre may also inadvertently become more about struggles over public space than about its original themes. Taken in combination, analysis of REPOhistory's projects can help to make distinctions between approaches that emphasize 'the city as a place for politics', 'a politics of place in the city', or 'critical placement of city politics.' These distinctions are useful when looking at contemporary practices.

Finally, it is important to highlight the ways in which different urban contexts and historical moments shaped these projects. *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* could be premised on oral histories and face-to-face engagement more easily because of the relatively restricted mobility of the people who had once lived in the neighbourhood. The *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* had less potential to provoke than it might have due to a context of hyper-tourism and heritage marketing. *Civil Disturbances* sparked the debates it did because of heightened tensions in New York City under Giuliani. It is also not insignificant that REPOhistory made public art in the years prior to the rise of Internet culture. In the period in which REPOhistory worked together (with the exception of the final years in which their last project, *Circulation,* was conceived) public art definitively meant art in city streets. Public space has simultaneously expanded and shrunk since that time; the internet has become a vast new form of public space, while the privatization and securitization of space in urban centers has arguably made exhibition and performance in material public spaces more difficult. And, while heritage marketing (history as tourist attraction) was already a social trend in the 1990s (a trend that REPOhistory very consciously strove to work in opposition to) it has become a veritable tour de force in the past decade. Cultural tourism and the creation of "authentic" historic city sites have become key methods through which cities pitch themselves as "world class", "creative" and "competitive."[422] This has led to the proliferation of "historic" districts and sites, sites that are more often than not devoid of reference to conflictual or difficult social histories. The hunger for these kinds of heritage sites on the part of developers, funders and municipal

governments has raised new challenges for critical site-specific artists.[423]

Analysis of REPOhistory's work from a contemporary perspective serves to bring these crucial shifts in social, political and economic context to light.

A look at site-specific engagement as taken up by REPOhistory (along with the attendant genealogy that I have provided) suggests that analysis of three criteria in particular is necessary when considering urban site-specific projects. The criteria that must be considered are:

1) The spatial imagination mobilized by the project. *At what scale is the site taken up? What relationships are made between scales? How is the local conceived?*

2) The specific urban context in which work is taken up. *What processes of placemaking* and displacement are at work?

3) The politics of engagement. How are participants and audience cast in the artistic process? What is the purpose of social engagement in the project? What kind of dialogue is desired and what kind of dialogue is produced?

My next chapter elaborates on these criteria.

Chapter Four - The Challenges of Place-based Engagement: Critical Lenses for Analysis

Bret Schneider: "Has the project of replacing a paradigm of grand narratives with one of more local, specialized, micropolitics proved itself to be equally ineffective in dealing with the present as a failure of previous hopes in the history of capitalism?"

Hal Foster: "I do not know, but I do not think so. I think the microalternative is only problematic when it becomes so micro that it is atomistic in an identitarian way and lacks any articulate connection to other stories, other projects, other struggles. But I do not think that is necessarily the case. How that is made articulate in art criticism or history seems to be a really important project. To do that in the space of the contemporary, which is more and more vast every day, or so it seems, is very difficult to do."

(*An interview with Hal Foster. Is the funeral for the wrong corpse?* Platypus Review 22, 2010)

Grant Kester has lamented a "lack of resources in modern art theory for engaging with projects that are organized around a collaborative, rather than a specular relationship with the viewer", arguing that "the idea that a work of art should solicit participation and involvement so openly, is antithetical to dominant beliefs in both modernist and postmodernist art and art theory."[424] Claire Bishop has argued that currently "a great swath of participatory art ends up floating in a comfortable non-zone where neither social or artistic criteria are being achieved/can be used as a basis for judgment."[425] Community-based performance scholar and practitioner Sonja Kuftinec asserts that "there remains a need in civically engaged art for critical assessment", noting that such critical assessment is best undertaken by those who are aware of the contextual specificities out of which the work springs.[426] Community artists have long argued that their work should be evaluated based on both final artistic outcomes and the processes through which those outcomes were achieved.

Clearly, to judge socially engaged art based on formal elements or subjective viewing pleasure alone is inadequate. Given that much of this work abandons the production of objects in favour of public conversations, performance and the creation of social experiences, Kester's argument that it is no longer adequate to consider the object "the primary carrier of aesthetic significance"[427] is widely agreed upon. In light of this problem, there has been a spate of new literature on socially engaged art practices.[428] As I made clear in my Introduction, however, while this literature is littered with references to "local" and "situational" projects it does not adequately elaborate on the relationship between site-specificity and social engagement in these art practices. Site is acknowledged as formative to many of these projects but how it is conceptualized and practiced is rarely considered in depth.

As my analysis of REPOhistory makes clear, we need to further elaborate the range of relationships between site-specificity and social engagement and to be aware of different art historical approaches to this relationship, even as contemporary practices blur the lines between them. I begin this chapter with a review of recent literature on the relationship between site-specificity and social engagement. I turn in particular to Miwon Kwon's 2002 call for new site-specific art[429] and curator Claire Doherty's subsequent use of Kwon's theoretical work.[430] I argue that Kwon's conclusions are better applied to process-based socially engaged art practices than to urban interventionist art. Based on my read of Kwon's theoretical conclusions, I then develop my own criteria through which to engage with site-specific participatory projects. I develop these criteria

particularly in order to analyze projects in Toronto but, as I discussed in my introductory chapter, they are worthy of consideration in a range of comparable urban contexts.

I propose three key criteria through which to critically analyze site-specific socially engaged art in Toronto. When considering a project it is important to look at:

1) **The spatial imagination it embodies**

2) **How it is relationally specific and at what scale**

3) **The politics of engagement it takes up**

Examination of these three criteria can expose creative tensions in the projects at hand, ideological positions that these projects enforce (sometimes unwittingly) and, the civic and aesthetic potential of these projects to challenge current social relations. In other words, these criteria can help us evaluate contemporary socially engaged practices politically, as the *social* practices they claim to be.[431] I conclude this chapter with a synthesis of the relationships between the criteria I have outlined.

As a preface to this discussion I want to emphasize the impossibility of ever fully evaluating the potential and pitfalls of socially engaged art practices. In light of the multiple ways any work of art can be read or, perhaps more appropriately in this case, *experienced* (both individually and collectively) we can never fully evaluate art. And considering the multiple spin-off effects of any social project it is impossible to pinpoint a moment at which any social practice is

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complete. In addition to these challenges, Bishop has noted the difficulty of

relying on documentation of socially engaged art practices, arguing that it is

difficult to research these practices unless one is actually involved in them in the

flesh, ideally for a long period of time.[432] I would add that the performative nature

of participant testimonials after the fact (often gathered by lead artists for grants

or promotional materials) also means that these sources and other

documentation need to be handled critically and can never tell the full story of a

project. The lenses I offer in this chapter, however, can help to rescue site-

specific socially engaged practices from the "comfortable non-zone" that Bishop

laments. They can help us examine the potential of these practices to deeply

challenge current social relations and to identify ways in which these projects

may collude with forces they intend to challenge. I begin the chapter with a

review of some of the key iterations of the relationship between site-specificity

and social engagement in the literature thus far. This sets the context for the

criteria I then propose.

Part One: The Vagaries of Site-Specificity

Recent literature on socially engaged art acknowledges site-specificity as

formative to many contemporary projects but does not carefully consider how

site-specificity is conceptualized and put into practice. Kester, for example, in his

2011 book *The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in A Global

Context* tells us that in new collaborative art "the habitus of interaction is an

essential constituent of creative action."[433] He writes:

In the most successful collaborative projects we encounter…a pragmatic openness to site and situation, a willingness to engage with specific cultures and communities in a creative and improvisational manner… a concern with non-hierarchical and participatory processes, and a critical and self-reflexive relationship to practice itself. Another important component is the desire to cultivate and enhance local forms of solidarity…These local identifications may, or may not, bear a relationship to larger political struggles or collective action.[434]

What Kester does not address in any depth, however, is the scale at which the local is identified within these projects, the challenges of local antagonisms (i.e. *which* version of the "local" do these projects align themselves with?) or what it means to be "open" to site and situation beyond an obvious openness to a generative and collective process of meaning-making. While Kester demonstrates that contemporary collaborative practices respond to complex social dynamics instead of trying to function in an autonomous or utopian zone (as per the goals of some avant-garde practices), this alone is hardly a guarantor of their potential for progressive social change. If we follow Kester's argument that contemporary collaborative practices function within a complex web of spatial and social politics then the logical next step is to examine the *specificities* of these politics and their political consequences. We need to move beyond highlighting socially engaged art's "openness" to site and further examine the implications of *how* artists and curators take up site. Kester does go into great detail about how his case studies develop site-specific cultural competency and work within the contradictions of "local" politics (rather than autonomously from them), but he does not leave us with criteria for assessment of these projects beyond a distinction between such process-based projects and those that impose a predetermined set of principles or ideas on a given site.

As I argued in my introduction, other recent literature on socially engaged art is similarly devoid of attention to site-specificity. While Claire Bishop's recent *Artificial Hells* provides a thorough and fascinating analysis of socially engaged participatory art over the past century and, like Kester's work, is dedicated to reading participatory projects contextually, a renewed interest in 'micropolitics' and the 'local' is not her concern. Bishop's real interest lies in challenging assumed equivalences between participation and criticality; and, co-authorship and the improvement of social conditions. By doing this, she offers some important criteria by which to judge socially engaged practices. But questions of placemaking and attempts by contemporary artists to create local solidarities or improve social conditions through site-specificity are not her purview. While I cannot review all of the recent literature on social practice here, neither is the local a particular concern in Nato Thompson's anthology on social practice *Living as Form* (2011), Tom Finkelpearl's *What We Made* (2013) or Shannon Jackson's *Social Works* (2011). These recent publications focus on the participatory nature of contemporary art practices, questions regarding authorship and, the relationship between art and 'the social realm'. While these questions are, of course, concerns in this dissertation as well, I am interested in the challenges of site-specific social engagement in a contemporary urban context. How do specific conceptualizations of place and engagement impact the artistic process and outcomes?

In light of social practice literature's neglect of place, where are we left in our understanding of the relationship between site-specificity and social

engagement? As I have shown in my chapter on REPOhistory, different lineages of socially engaged art have approached the relationship between site and engagement in distinct ways. Counter-monumental art practices treat places as contested sites of trauma and unresolved violence, which the audience/participant must take responsibility for. The public that constitutes the audience is unspecified and social engagement is expected to occur in response to a finished sculptural object. Renewed social responsibility for human rights, continuously fostered through ongoing debate and dialogue, is the result these practices seek to effect. In juxtaposition to this, community artists treat place as a site of underrepresented stories and profile the vernacular in order to foster deeper social engagement. The audience is usually more carefully defined in this field and engagement focuses on face-to-face relationships, built through storytelling. The scale at which place is taken up is often at the scale of the neighbourhood. Finally, urban interventionist art is invested in challenging the supposed neutrality of urban geography, taking up site-specificity at the scale of 'the city'. The audience develops a new sense of the site through their participation in or experience of the intervention. The cultural construction and consequent mutability of the city is highlighted.

Counter-monumental practice, community art traditions and urban interventionist art all inform today's social practice. The commonality between these lineages is their treatment of place/space as *socially produced*. While some site-specific artists are still invested in searching for a "genius loci", the trend in contemporary art practice has been to turn away from this approach to

place and to focus more on place as "a social and political construct as well as a physical one."[435] Kwon highlights "[t]he increasing institutional interest in current site-oriented practices that mobilize the site as a discursive narrative."[436] I named some of the key reasons for this increasing interest in my Introduction to this dissertation.

The Wrong Place and "New Forms of Belonging"'

Over the past 20 years, increased institutional interest in the discursive production of urban sites has produced "an intensive physical mobilization of the artist to create works in various cities throughout the cosmopolitan art world."[437] Curator Claire Doherty, one of the theorists who has come closest in recent years to thinking through the relationship between site-specificity and social engagement, has taken up the implications of site-based biennials and other "scattered-site" exhibitions.[438] Doherty contends that site-specificity has been replaced by "situation specificity."[439] According to Doherty, artists increasingly forgo site as a pre-existing entity and treat it rather as an event, a moment, a contextual *situation*. As examples of situational work, Doherty describes a number of projects in *Skulptur Projects Münster 2007* and *One Day Sculpture* (New Zealand, 2008-2009), in which she claims that artworks produced disorienting effects, making their viewers profoundly aware of their own relationships to the urban contexts they found themselves in.[440] Doherty refers to engagement with these artworks as a process of "unknowing place."[441] She ends

her introduction to *Situation,* an anthology of writing on artistic practices "for which the 'situation' or 'context' is often the starting point"[442] with this statement:

> If we understand place as an unstable, shifting set of political, social and economic and material relations and locality as produced and contested through a set of conditions that we might describe as situation, our experience of works which truly produce remarkable engagements with place will be characterized by a sense of *dislocation-* encouraging us no longer to look with the eyes of a tourist but to become implicated in the jostling contingency of mobilities and relations that constitute contemporaneity.[443]

Doherty argues that projects like Francis Alys' *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002) and Jeremy Dellar's *The Battle of Orgreave* take up Kwon's concept of "the wrong place", which I outlined in my introduction. Kwon offers the concept of the "wrong place" as an alternative to an approach to place which searches for roots, authenticity and belonging (a search for the "right place", in other words).[444] According to Doherty, Alys and Dellar (as well as other artists in scattered-site exhibitions) "effect a sense of the wrong place by shifting the status quo, by intervening in the bordered, prescribed spaces of location."[445] If we follow the line of thinking in Doherty's publications and talks[446] it seems that more and more artists are creating encounters with "wrong places", thereby exposing "the instability of the 'right place', and by extension the instability of the self."[447]

Indeed, it does seem that many artists have veered away from the problematic *site as community* approach that Kwon so articulately critiques in her analysis of new genre public art. As Kwon herself notes in her conclusion to *One Place After Another*, to treat site as "fixed" or "rooted" is now commonly

understood by critics and curators as politically dubious and artistically outdated

(which is not to say that it isn't still a concept that's still taken up in practice).

Instead many artists now treat site as layered, a kind of critical palimpsest. One

might think of projects in which memory or stories inhere in the city (the *[murmur]*

project, for example or Janet Cardiff's audio walking tours). We might also think

of practices in which the artist plays archaeologist (Mark Dion's urban

excavations, for example). And then there are critical signage projects like those

of Edgar Hachivi Heap-of-Birds, counter-monuments like those of Krzysztof

Wodiczko or audio installations like Graeme Miller's *Linked* (London, 2003).

Urban interventionist projects continue to emerge and many of them are

fascinating. They have the potential to provoke new imaginings for urban futures

and to rupture a city's performance of neutrality through their reminders of the

past. They can capture the imagination of the spectator (or, more often, the

listener, *walker*, *witness* or *participant)* and can alter his or her personal sense of

place profoundly. Whether artists begin with a preconceived theme and look for a

site through which to explore that theme or begin with a site and develop their

themes out of the site, these projects approach site as politically and socially

invested, perhaps a site of loss or violence. In these projects site can become a

mediating element through which to provoke disorientation and perhaps even

dialogue. Indeed, such work contributes to "unknowing place" and can powerfully

contest dominant representations of particular cities, neighbourhoods and

hyperlocal sites like monuments and parks.

While I deeply appreciate the provocations at work in urban interventionist projects, however, I do not read Kwon's call for new approaches to site-specificity as just a call for art practices that disorient their audience. Kwon makes it clear that she is wary of the contemporary pull towards "a system of movement and ungrounding."[448] In fact, she states her wariness as a reason for the development of her call for new approaches to place. Kwon warns us that: "Under the pretext of their articulation or resuscitation, site-specific art can be mobilized to expedite the erasure of differences via the commodification and serialization of places."[449] Kwon points out that critical artists can, in fact, find themselves for hire supplying "distinction of place and uniqueness of locational identity, highly seductive qualities in the promotion of towns and cities within the competitive restructuring of the global economic hierarchy."[450] In other words, no matter the criticality of a given project insofar as it upends traditional representations of an urban site, site-specific art is an active participant in place differentiation and therefore in place marketing.

Our predicament now, Kwon says, is that we can neither retreat to a traditional (and dangerous) understanding of site (a "rooted" sense of place where we belong) nor should we acquiesce to the deployment of artists as mobile critical service providers in a new kind of product differentiation, producing a constant series of places "*one after another*."[451] The treatment of site by itinerant artists "as predominantly an intertextually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation,"[452] Kwon argues, is dangerous in its own way.

Instead, she writes, we bear "the burden of the necessity and impossibility of modeling new forms of being in-place, new forms of belonging."[453]

It is the call for *new forms of belonging* that I think Doherty is overlooking in her use of Kwon's work. To what extent are the art practices Doherty references or the practices I have referenced above creating *new forms of belonging* out of the disorientation they produce*?* As I discuss in my analysis of REPOhistory, Kester makes a strong distinction between a longstanding avant-garde approach to art, in which the purpose of art is to provoke the spectator into new ways of seeing, to "challenge and destabilize normative bourgeois values,"[454] and generative processes in which the goal is not provocation but shared creative labour and collective meaning-making. In fact, Kester juxtaposes one of the very same projects Doherty cites, Francis Alys' *When Faith Moves Mountains,* against the new generative projects he is interested in. In Alys' work (as well as that of other 'neoconceptual' artists), Kester writes, "'[w]hile the image or idea may be generated in response to a particular context or situation, the artist's relationship to site is largely appropriative, and the locus of creativity resides primarily at the level of autonomous conceptual ideation."[455] "The world," he continues, "becomes an extension of the artist's suum, a kind of reservoir from which he or she may draw at will in elaborating his or her particular vision."[456] In juxtaposition to this, the work of groups like *Park Fiction*, *Ala Plastica* and others that Kester champions are framed as processes "of shared, rather than singularized expression"[457] in which "the act of expression is generative and contingent."[458] The groups that take up these dialogical practices,

Kester argues, "conceive of site less as a reservoir of formal or representational material that is ready-to-hand, than as a space in which action is constituted and reconstituted on an ongoing basis."[459]

While I do not share Kester's seeming disdain for artistic practices that aim to provoke, the socially engaged art practices I am interested in here, like Kester's examples, are not solely about provocation. Nor are they only about creating new ways of seeing the city (though this is certainly part of their project). These practices are also invested in forming solidarities, coalitions and new communities. In other words, they are invested in contributing to the "*new forms of belonging"* that Kwon calls for. They propose themselves as forms of social or political *grounding*. This makes them very different proposals, with potentially much deeper challenges, than projects that seek solely to provoke viewers. While effectively creating a sense of disorientation in an age of spectacle is itself a difficult task (as I have demonstrated in my analysis of REPOhistory's work), forming social solidarities around a place *out of that disorientiation* is, I think, an even greater challenge. To build solidarities and place-based coalitions without resorting to bounded notions of community or essentialist concepts of place, to stake local claims while keeping a site open to contestation- these are indeed very difficult but (as Kwon argues) necessary undertakings.

It is toward practices that seek to build solidarities, deepen social relations and engage in sustained processes of placemaking that Kwon's rich ideas are most usefully directed. Kwon calls for site-specific art that is "*out* of place with punctuality and precision."[460] In the conclusion to *One Place After Another* it

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seems that she is less interested in the creation of a wrong place than art practices that reflect a "*relational specificity*."[461] Kwon does not deeply elaborate on her understanding of relational specificity but does suggest it necessitates a focus on uneven conditions *between* places and people and a focus on the ways in which movement and stasis, space and place are "*sustaining* relation*s*", rather than oppositions.[462] "Only those cultural practices that have this relational sensibility can turn local encounters into long-term commitments and transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks," Kwon concludes.[463] In fact it is worth noting that Doherty herself is "somewhat suspicious about whether the international scattered site exhibition is the most appropriate context in which to consider place through the commissioning of new artworks."[464] The most interesting place-responsive projects, she concedes, do not emerge in response to such exhibitions but from other motivations.[465]

The projects I take up here do not happen to be in a public place or situated outdoors, and therefore somehow vaguely site-specific or "site-oriented". They do not merely treat the city as an expanded exhibition space, as I have argued REPOhistory's *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* did. Nor are they provocations only. These projects focus on place-based social engagement and intervene in local dynamics, whether they are local politics, local culture, or local economies. The important point is that these projects are framed as responses to local conditions and as attempts to create new forms of engagement within the frame of the local. This is why how they take up both locality and engagement matters.

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Socially engaged art practices are often framed as intervention into 'everyday' life and 'everyday' places. Again, I want to point out that functionally the 'everyday' has become synonymous with the local, and this is why it's crucial to examine site-specificity in its *specificities*. In Thompson's anthology, *Living as Form,* architect Teddy Cruz writes:

> [I]t is necessary to move from the generality of the term "public" in our political debate to the specificity of rights to the city, and its neighbourhoods…This can be in the form of small incremental acts of retrofit of existing urban fabrics and regulation….It is not the "image" of the everyday and its metaphorical content that is at stake here… More than ever, we must engage the 'praxis' of the everyday, enabling functional relationships between individuals, as collectives, and their environments, as new critical interfaces between research, artistic intervention, and the production of the city.[466]

It is projects that stem from this kind of sentiment that I am interested in probing.

Towards Retheorizing the Wrong Place

To synthesize, it seems (ironically) that site-specificity, both as a concept in the literature and as a practice, appears to continue to *lack* specificity in the 21st Century. We need to distinguish between site-specific art that seeks solely to disorient and practices that seek to create new social formations. My intent here is not to take up Kester's almost vehement criticism of artistic practices in which provocation of the spectator is the primary goal. In fact, I will argue later in this chapter that provocation and coalition-building are not per se opposing projects at all. My point, rather, is that *if* the goal of much of today's site-specific socially engaged art is to build solidarities, to alter actual social relationships (as opposed to alienated social *relations*) or to foster social change at a local scale, a much

more careful consideration of how these practices take up site and engagement is necessary. These practices demand to be examined in light of their potential to challenge current social relations and in that case we cannot ignore how they conceptualize place and engagement. We need to look in these cases at the social processes by which places are constructed and at the role site-specific participatory practices play in this construction.

We might draw inspiration here from critical geography. The art world's broad understanding of site as socially produced, rather than as a neutral container for social action, mirrors developments in human geography since the 1970s. Critical geographers like David Harvey changed the field of geography by arguing that space is socially produced.[467] Throughout his career, Harvey has argued that the most interesting questions are not "What is space?" or "What is place?" but, rather: "by what social process(es) is place constructed?"[468] The latter question has spawned reams of geographical inquiry since the 1970s. Not only have critical geographers focused on how space is produced but they have also focused on the ways in which, in turn, particular spaces generate particular social constructions and behaviour.

Just as geographers have turned to the social processes by which place is constructed and their political consequences, so too must critics, curators and artists. As important as it is to recognize site as constructed and generative, this is not enough. If sites are indeed "generative" then what are they generating? It is indeed interesting that contemporary artists understand site as "a generative locus of individual and collective identities, actions, and histories,"[469] and that

"the unfolding of artistic subjectivity awaits the specific insights generated by this singular coming-together."[470] But we need tools with which to think through how each site is socially produced and how artists contribute to or contest that social production. We need to think more deeply about both discursive and material iterations of place and 'the local' conditions of social engagement. And we need to think about how the cultural production of one place (via site-specific artistic practice) might impact the production of another.

For the second half of this chapter I develop three criteria that can help us to consider site-specific socially engaged practices in Toronto and other comparable cities. I want to preface these criteria, with a reminder that while socially engaged art projects are *social* projects and may create real changes in the operation of local economies or social relations, these projects function symbolically as much if not more than they function practically.[471] This is important to remember when developing lenses through which to understand them. Were projects like Toronto's *Really Really Free Market* (Whippersnapper Gallery) or *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* only operating as functional replacements for local economies or services it might be less important to examine the ideals they espouse. "Well, at least they exist and are doing *something,*" we might say, "however flawed they are." But, as Claire Bishop argues, these practices are better understood as forms "of experimental activity."[472] "At a certain point," Bishop writes, "art has to hand over to other institutions if social change is to be achieved: it is not enough to keep producing activist *art*."[473] Perhaps in contrast to Bishop, I believe that art itself *can* create

material social change. It can create new social relationships, imagine social alternatives, produce new critiques of current politics. As *Project Row Houses* (Houston, Texas, 1993- ongoing) indicates, socially engaged projects can sustain local cultural activity for decades even. To think, though, that most recent social practices are themselves an *end point* of social change or a replacement for other social institutions is naïve in my opinion. These experiments exist in relation to other political and institutional structures[474] and are, in keeping with Bishop's point, best seen as social experiments in new ways of being together; new forms of dialogue or belonging. These practices, then, have to be taken up symbolically, for the social ideals they represent and the visions of place and democracy they articulate, both implicitly and explicitly. I turn to my analytical lenses with this understanding of socially engaged art.

Part Two: Analytical Lenses

In this second half of the chapter I propose analytical lenses through which we can consider socially engaged site-specific artistic practices. I argue first that how place is conceptualized has critical political ramifications. The **spatial imagination** at work in any given project must be considered. Geographer Doreen Massey has articulated a "progressive sense of place"[475] and argued that place-based movements for social change can be progressive if they embody the spatial imagination she proposes. I outline Massey's conception of place and offer questions we can ask of artistic practices based on her theoretical work. The second lens I offer is an elaboration of **relational specificity** (a key concept for both Kwon and Massey) as it applies to Toronto. I argue that a dialectical

relationship between placemaking and displacement in Toronto makes it

necessary to consider relational specificity at a range of scales when looking at

these artistic practices. Finally, I wade into the complex but critical debates

regarding the **politics of engagement** in the burgeoning field of socially

engaged art. I briefly review the key contours of these debates (which I have

already touched on in my chapter on REPOhistory and in the first half of this

chapter) and offer my own analysis of engagement, based on the premises of my

first two criteria. I argue that while social antagonisms and solidarity are often

juxtaposed in the literature on socially engaged art they should not be

understood as such. I propose the concept of "dilemmatic space"[476] as a lens

through which to read socially engaged site-specific practices. Dilemmatic space

shares, I argue, many of the same features as Massey's progressive sense of

place.

Lens One: Spatial Imagination

The first criterion that must be considered when analyzing any socially engaged

site-specific art practice is the **spatial imagination** it embodies. If social

engagement is premised on place, the local, or the 'everyday' (often a code for

the local), how does an artist or curator take up the very concept of place or

locality? As I discussed in my introduction, the terms "local", "place" and "space"

can be conceptualized and practiced in a range of ways, with varying political

implications. It is clear that locality can be taken up in nostalgic, conservative or

outright xenophobic ways. While contemporary art literature often frames today's

emphases on the local as critical responses to global capitalism (prompted by the

absence or rejection of any united political project), geographical literature has shown that turns to the local and place-identity are often troubling responses "to the exoticism of a cosmopolitan mongrel world."[477] The invention of traditions[478] and the development of commemorative sites in order to foster nationalisms have been well documented and analyzed.[479] But, of course, cultural practices can also foster collective identities premised on an us/them binary at a local scale, sometimes unwittingly.[480] Attempts to capture or represent the 'identity' of a place (be they for marketing purposes, undertaken with radical intent or based on the psychological desire for place that Lippard writes about) often "construct singular fixed and static identities for places, and… interpret places as bounded, enclosed spaces defined through counterposition against the Other who is outside."[481] As are appeals to community, attempts to foster place-identity are liable to overwrite internal differences in a search for unity.[482]

We need, then, to examine how "locality" and "place" are conceptualized in contemporary socially engaged art practices. However progressive socially engaged artists might intend to be in their attempts to foster local solidarities, there is a distinct danger that their projects will reify localism in a way that excludes people and narratives considered to be on the 'outside.' There is also a danger that such practices will abdicate responsibility for social conditions just beyond their immediate reach, even as they claim to contest such conditions. As I will discuss further in my elaboration of relational specificity, animation of the local is particularly troubled terrain in the context of postcolonial, transnational and increasingly neoliberal cities.[483] How can we conceptualize place in these

contexts? What is a progressive animation of place in light of the displacements at work in cities with these dynamics? And what, in turn, might constitute a limited or damaging approach to place?

A number of scholars have taken up the task of reconceptualizing place, working in a range of disciplines including History,[484] Environmental History,[485] Anthropology,[486] and Geography.[487] I find the work of geographer Doreen Massey particularly useful. Massey is arguably the theorist who has most clearly articulated a critical conceptualization of place. Arguments for a "politics of place *beyond* place"[488] have figured prominently in her work over the past twenty years. Massey began to explicitly identify the core elements of a progressive politics of place in the early 1990s in response to the David Harvey's concept of "time-space compression,"[489] around the same time that Harvey himself argued *against* place-based identities and social movements.[490] As I discuss below, Massey's 1991 essay *A Global Sense of Place* and 1993 essay *Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place* challenged readers to think of places as internally heterogeneous, contested, relational and, historically shaped by global forces and flows. Massey has followed these essays with further work on this subject, including the article "Geographies of Responsibility" (2004) and the books *For Space* (2005) and *World City* (2007). In order to illuminate Massey's theorization of place, I first briefly outline Harvey's early arguments about place and space, as they provide an important context for Massey's work.

"From Space to Place and Back Again"

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey argued that globalization could be understood as "time-space compression," a speeding up due to new technologies and advanced capitalist economies, which results in the reduction of spatial and temporal distances. The nineties were in fact dominated by the impression that the world was "shrinking" as global commodity flows increased and new technologies emerged that made increased global communication possible. This was a time in which there was great concern that culture was homogenizing as mass-produced goods, foods and other cultural products increasingly circulated. It was also a time in which violent nationalist and place-based uprisings, including the dissolution of Yugoslavia, received significant media attention.[491] What Harvey termed "time-space compression" was accompanied then, by tandem anxiety about the encroachment of "space" onto local "places" and violent 'defenses' of place against perceived outsiders.

Not only was Harvey interested in the phenomenon of "time-space compression", he was also deeply concerned by the desire for a rooted sense of place that it produced from actors on both ends of the left/right political spectrum. Appeals to place in response to spatial insecurity, Harvey argued, are in the end politically futile, if not outright dangerous. In *From Space to Place and Back Again* (first delivered as a talk in 1990 and subsequently published in 1993) Harvey begins with the premise that places are formed through processes of uneven capital development. As global capital moves, Harvey argues, places remain a form of fixed capital continuously reinventing themselves in the hopes

of attracting or holding onto capital. Place-distinctiveness is fostered in order for the market to function while capital flows between places without regard for their qualitative differences. Inter-place competition has significantly intensified as a result of time-space compression, argues Harvey. As awareness of the mobility of capital increases, so too do attempts to remake place, in the desperate attempt to attract capital. Places, then, cannot be considered singular because their differences are produced in relation to capital and because they are bound by their implication within capitalism.

Harvey then goes on to make the case that, whatever their stated politics, place-based identities and movements pit supposedly bounded and "secure" entities against unpredictable global forces. *From Space to Place and Back Again* surveys a range of approaches to place and ultimately finds them all politically suspect. Even "militant particularism", which is resistance to global capitalism based on particularity and differentiation (a place-based socialist commune, for example) is found faulty, in that it may produce better conditions in one place at the expense of a broader politics of justice.[492] In short, Harvey argues that we cannot turn back from globalized space. Emphases on place identity can be undertaken for progressive reasons but, dangerously, "also appeal to the parochial and exclusive forces of bigotry and nationalism."[493]

A "Politics of Place beyond Place"

Doreen Massey wrote *A Global Sense of Place* in response to critiques (like Harvey's) of place differentiation as "necessarily reactionary."[494] In *A Global*

Sense of Place Massey argues that developing a progressive sense of place

from which to act politically is, in fact, both possible and important. "The question

is how to hold on to that notion of geographical difference, of uniqueness, even of

rootedness if people want that, without it being reactionary," she writes.[495]

Massey undertakes the challenge of holding on to place as a progressive source

of political action first by illustrating the oversimplification of "time-space

compression" by Marxist geographers[496]. In *A Global Sense of Place* Massey

argues that our experiences of place are not only determined by capitalism but

by race and gender as well. Massey develops the important concept of the

power-geometry of globalization, a concept that has gained significant traction

since the publication of *A Global Sense of Place.* She illustrates that while some

groups of people are in charge of time-space compression, others are "on the

receiving-end of it" and others yet "effectively imprisoned by it."[497] Massey makes

a relational connection between the power of some groups to control global flows

and the reduced power of other groups:

> It is not simply a question of unequal distribution, that some people move
> more than others, and that some have more control than others. It is that
> the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people.
> Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak. The
> time-space-compression of some groups can undermine the power of
> others.[498]

After this significant intervention into the narrative of time-space

compression, Massey turns to the question of place. She writes:

> We need…to think through what might be an adequately progressive sense of place, one which would fit in with the current global-local times and the feelings and relations they give rise to, *and* which would be useful in what are, after all, political struggles often inevitably based on place.[499]

Place when conceived as stasis against the movement of time, Massey argues, is indeed a dangerous concept. The idea that place can offer a retreat from a perceived new barrage of difference in a globalizing world should certainly be done away with. Rather, Massey contends, we should remember that places have never been retreats from difference- this has only ever been a dangerous fantasy. Places have, in reality, always been heterogeneous and fluid and have always been shaped by forces outside of their perceived boundaries:

> what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalised history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus... Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.[500]

What Massey does, then, in *A Global Sense of Place*, is make an argument for the progressive possibility of place-based action. We do not necessarily have to *retreat* to place when we engage with it but can take up place-based action critically, with an eye to power differentials both within our immediate surroundings and an eye to the relational differences between places- how places are linked and produce one another.

Since *A Global Sense of Place*, Massey has continued to distinguish between reactionary conceptualizations of place and progressive conceptualizations of place. Much of her work over the past twenty years has challenged "attempts to fix the meaning of places, to enclose and defend them."[501] Instead, Massey asks us to "challenge the current exoneration of 'the local' within a critical global politics, and begin to develop a local politics of place *beyond* place."[502] She insists that we ought to think of place/space as "simultaneity of stories-so-far."[503] It is important to note Massey's use of both the terms "place" and "space" here. While Massey began by arguing for a progressive sense of *place* she titled her most recent theoretical work on this topic *For space* (2005). In all of this work, Massey is interested in challenging common understandings of place and space; the binary which frames place as particular, bounded and rooted and space as empty, neutral and universal. The semantic differences between place and space, then, don't seem to matter to Massey. Instead she is provoking a new spatial imagination.

A full review of Massey's body of literature on place is far beyond the scope of this chapter, but Massey's arguments for a politics of place *beyond* place throughout this literature can be synthesized as four key contentions:

1) Places have always been heterogeneous and globally constituted, shaped by forces outside of their assumed physical boundaries.
2) Places are experienced differently by different groups of people. Race, class and gender are critical factors in the experience of place.
3) Places are fluid, always in process, simultaneous and contested.
4) Places are relationally constituted and therefore exist in a network of "geographic responsibilities".

These assertions about place provide a lens through which to examine the

spatial imagination at work in site-specific artistic practices. While they may at

first glance seem straightforward, it is worth elaborating on Massey's articulation

of each of these points, even if briefly, and on the kinds of questions her

assertions pose for site-specific artistic practice. Massey makes these theoretical

arguments precisely *because* how we conceptualize space/place matters to how

we conceptualize political engagement.[504] Likewise, how place is conceptualized

crucially conditions an artistic project's approach to social engagement. As I will

show, the kinds of social engagement that follow from Massey's articulations of

place are notably different from social engagement based on a search for the

essence of a place or even on an undifferentiated or unexamined sense of place.

1) Places are heterogeneous and globally constituted.

Massey's argument that places are both heterogeneous and globally

constituted can be understood as an argument for an *unbounded* sense of place.

Massey contends that the dominant contemporary conceptualization of place

"artificially localizes [it]… and draws boundaries that were never really there."[505]

Places, rather, are junctures of multidirectional flows of people, products and

culture. Massey writes:

> This is a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of
> place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of
> relative isolation- not to be disrupted by globalisation- but precisely from
> the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together
> there."[506]

In this read of place, site-specificity must inevitably look beyond the immediate (perceived) contours of site itself to the particular trajectories through which the current iteration of the site has been created. Considering every place as a site of coexisting differences, themselves the result of global flows, provides an orientation toward place for site-specific artists that moves away from the much critiqued search for commonalities or consensus.[507] Assuming heterogeneity as a starting point and searching for the external forces which have produced this particular constellation of heterogeneity renders any artistic choice to focus solely on 'the local' impossible. We might think here of Kester's argument that today's successful collaborative projects are "local identifications", which "may, or may not, bear a relationship to larger political struggles or collective action."[508] If we think of site as unbounded and produced by forces outside of its perceived boundaries, relationships to *other* political struggles are necessarily taken up, though these struggles may not be *larger* per se.

2) Places are experienced differently by different groups of people.

Massey's second crucial observation, that places are experienced differently by different groups of people and that race, class and gender are critical factors in the experience of place, also provides a clear orientation for site-specific artistic practice. I have already discussed Massey's argument that under the conditions of time-space compression different groups and individuals have very different relationships to mobility and global flows. On one hand this seems a very obvious point. Place-identities are formed differentially for different social groups and for different individuals, depending on their mobility. The

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political boundaries of a place may entirely restrict the movement of someone without legal status, for example, while a well-heeled citizen may hardly consider them. A step out of the lights of a busy street into a park at night may be unthinkable to a teenage girl walking home yet utterly easy for some grown men. But, yet again, this relatively straightforward point forces a perspective on site-specificity that is often forgotten, provoking questions like: For whom is the site restrictive? Is the site more important to some groups than others? How do different groups perceive the geographical boundaries of the site? Is the site effectively *larger* for some than for others?

In the fields of community art and site-specific performance there is still often an assumption that the people who live in a site know it best. In a common artistic approach to site, artist Tacita Dean, for example, says that artists can know place "in a way that is associative and non-verbal. They can use media and techniques that can describe a place tangentially, for example with sound or narrative…"[509] This is an argument for a phenomenological approach to place, an argument that one can come to know place through embodiment. Massey's reminder that each social location produces a different sense of place, however, complicates this phenomenological approach. From Massey's perspective, no one knows a place beyond the limits of their own social location. This opens up the whole question of 'local knowledge', which so many site-specific projects seek to engage.[510] While it does not render the concept of local knowledge nonsensical, it does remind us that local knowledge is always situated, always partial and can never be cohesive. To be 'open' to site, then, entails much more

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than just experiencing the 'local'. Rather, it means opening oneself to an awareness of how many different experiences of the site exist simultaneously.

3) Places are fluid, always in process, simultaneous and contested.

Massey also vehemently contests popular understandings of space as an empty or neutral site upon which temporal processes happen. In her 2005 article, *Geographies of Responsibility*, Massey goes to great lengths to show that London, as a global city, *produces* global capitalism. This is place not just as a victim of the movement of capital but as an agent of it. To see place as a victim, she says, is in fact an 'aspatial' sense of space, a sense of space that does not recognize how space itself produces power. Instead, Massey argues, we must "recognise space as always under construction," always in the process of becoming.[511] Massey writes: "Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations that are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed."[512]

Again, this point may at first seem quite simple but in fact has crucial ramifications for site-specificity. Viewing place as contested and in process moves us away from any search for the essence of a space and revives instead the political dimensions of place. The artistic question worth exploring is no longer "What is this place?" but "What are the (contested) dynamics of this place right now?" This understanding of place begs us to consider different possible iterations of the site in the present and different possibilities for the future. Considering place as always contested frames site as a negotiation, laden with

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power relations. Like Massey's reminder that places are always heterogeneous, this provokes a search for different perspectives rather than a search for commonality. In this light, place can be seen as a challenging experiment in being together, perhaps even in democracy. Massey writes: "what is special about place is ... the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here and now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres); and a negotiation which must take place with and between both human and nonhuman."[513] Questions that might emerge out of this reminder that place is always in process and always contested are: What is being negotiated in this place at this time? What specific constellation has been formed out of global flows in this moment? How might changes to any aspect of that constellation shift the dynamics of this place?

4) Places are relationally constituted and therefore exist in a network of 'geographical responsibilities'.

I am particularly interested in Massey's argument that places are relationally constituted and therefore exist in a network of "geographies of responsibility."[514] Massey draws on anti-essentialist theories of identity, which posit identity as formed through social interaction, in relation to others,[515] to make an argument for a relational sense of place. Places, too, are produced in relation to each other, she reminds us, and are the result of flows beyond their borders.

If we do think of place as unbounded, as specific constellations of flows that reach beyond their perceived boundaries, Massey writes, we must consequently think about how places are responsible to one another. Where do the flows go and what is their impact? Massey contests a hegemonic Western

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notion of responsibility, in which responsibility "takes the form of a nested set of Russian dolls. First there is "home", then perhaps place or locality, then nation and so on."[516] To think of place relationally, Massey argues, entails thinking of our responsibility beyond the local, to think about how our local politics 'here' impact 'elsewhere.'

Not only do we need to think relationally but we also need to think specifically, as places have different positions in the 'power-geometry' of globalization.[517] While some places might well be victims of global processes, people in other places produce those processes and are therefore agents in globalization. Massey argues that, too often:

> globalisation figures as some sort of external agent that arrives to wreak havoc on local places….The resulting politics in consequence often resolves into strategies for "defending" local places against the global. Such strategies always tend to harbour a host of political ambiguities, but in the case of London (and of places like London – of which, to varying degrees, there are many) this simple story just cannot hold. For London is one of those places in which capitalist globalisation, with its deregulation, privatisation, "liberalisation", is produced. Here we have also "the local production of the global."[518]

The local, then, and particularly the local as it exists in the 'global city', is responsible for producing global politics. It is not enough to say that one is working only locally, as to work locally is always to work globally as well, though the impact of one's local work depends dramatically on the relative power of the place one works from.

This concept of place, again, can potentially shift the orientation of site-specific artistic practice. If the local cannot be conceived of as only responsible

for itself but must bear responsibility for elsewhere, seemingly innocuous or positive initiatives, such as the building of a community garden, the adoption of a local development plan or the development of a local currency must be analyzed in terms of their effects beyond 'the local'. To abandon a universal theory of social change for a local politics, then, is not to abdicate responsibility to the global at all, but rather to take responsibility for particular trajectories beyond the perceived boundary of the 'local.' This iteration of site-specificity is both deeply interesting and might prove a real challenge for artists who work with the affective dimensions of place. It can be much easier to produce feeling for something 'known' and 'intimate', something "here" than it can be for the unknown, for "there".

Reviving the Political Dimensions of Place

I have rehearsed Massey's theoretical arguments about place because they provide a useful set of questions to consider when looking at site-specific socially engaged practices in Toronto and elsewhere. While seemingly straightforward in some respects, Massey's theorization of place is remarkably different from popular iterations of place and, I would argue, from how site-specificity is taken up in much of the literature on socially engaged art. Massey's ideas provide us with a lens through which to consider the spatial imagination at work in any given project and, in doing so, revive the political dimensions of socially engaged practice. In fact, even by articulating a specific spatial imagination, Massey illuminates the hegemonic constructions of place and space that are so often at

work in popular discourse. Massey does this precisely in order to push for a new set of political relations. It is politically disabling, she contends, to think of capitalism as a *placeless* global force.[519] Rather, capitalist relations are made through places and carefully maintained, particularly through the production of global cities.[520]

Massey's politics of place *beyond* place can serve as a reminder that very different forms of social engagement ensue from different conceptualizations of place itself. When we think of places as unbounded, heterogeneous and connected, site-specific social engagement no longer means solely 'local' engagement. Considering socially engaged site-specific practices from this vantage point can prompt questions like: Where do the boundaries of a site end? How are they imagined? Which identity or identities does the project discursively affiliate with a place? Which aspects of a site's heterogeneity are left out of the focus? What relationships are made between 'local' dynamics and dynamics elsewhere? How does the artistic project recognize, challenge or work with the 'power-geometry of time-space compression'? How does the project take up geographical responsibility? To be site-*specific* is to consider these questions carefully.

It is worth noting that even writing about place according to Massey's progressive iteration of it proves a challenge, as the terminology available pushes one back to a bounded conceptualization of place. Words like *inside, outside, local, global, community, extra-local, parochial, encroachments, retreats*; all continue to draw one back to a space/place binary. And yet, Massey argues

that to practice place as porous and relational is even more of a challenge than to speak of it in theory, and is still rarely done.[521] I am most interested in how socially engaged art might do just this, working with and from place in a way that is specific and grounded but is simultaneously relational and porous. This might well offer a way into the "new forms of being in-place, new forms of belonging" called for by Kwon.[522] Working from a sense of place that is porous and relational, however, remains a significant challenge. I turn now to some of the contours of that challenge in the context of Toronto.

Lens Two: Relational Specificity and Scale in Toronto
If, in keeping with Massey, we are going to think of place relationally it is important to consider relationships between places at a range of scales.[523] I have shown in my analysis of REPOhistory's projects that site-specificity can address place at different scales, with different implications for social engagement. In thinking through the potential and challenges of site-specific projects in Toronto, I want to turn to the question of placemaking at both the neighbourhood scale and the city scale. Different parts of Toronto are discursively constructed in relation to each other. In light of this, site-specific projects in Toronto must approach place relationally. Site-specificity also entails consideration of the dialectical relationship between placemaking and displacement in this city.

The Power-geometry of Toronto
In Toronto one can observe a whirlwind of accelerated mobility and change. As in many other 'global' cities,[524] capital moves quickly through the city in the forms of

international trade, real estate speculation, condominium development, international tourism and spectacular cultural festivals. Transnational corporations make the city their base and conduct business from here on the world markets. Downtown neighbourhoods change quickly, as buyers continue to snap up properties despite the highest housing prices in history.[525] In these same neighbourhoods, rapidly changing business façades on commercial strips reflect the new demographics of residents.

Not only does capital move through the city, so too do people. Toronto is a key port of arrival for many immigrants to Canada. Between 2001 and 2006, over a quarter of a million international immigrants arrived in the City of Toronto[526] and, according to the 2011 census the city's population grew by 9.2% between 2006 and 2011.[527] Even traffic is flowing at an increased volume, reflecting population growth and increasing distances between home and work for many Toronto-area residents. This city, then, can be thought of as 'on the move', perhaps now more than ever before.[528]

While one can note rapid movement into and within the city, however, it is also important to take note of whom and what are being forced to move *out* as well as whom and what are forced to *stay put*. Cultural tourism has been accompanied by increased surveillance and securitization of the city's public spaces since the mid-nineties,[529] and therefore by intensified restrictions on the movement of street-involved and homeless residents as well as racialized youth. Toronto Community Housing buildings in the downtown core have been sold to compensate for tax cuts, forcing their residents to move elsewhere in a search

for affordable housing.[530] As all levels of government continue to dismantle the welfare state, public services are reduced or inadequately funded, leading to restricted mobility for the many residents who depend on them. The infrequency of buses on routes linking low-income neighbourhoods to the subway line is but an obvious example of how neoliberalism in Toronto has led to restricted mobility for all but relatively affluent downtown-dwellers.

Mobility in this city, then, has increased for some people (and products) but stayed the same or decreased for others. Massey's observation that the *power geometry* of time-space compression is such that "different social groups, and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to flows and interconnections"[531] is very much relevant in an analysis of Toronto today, her point that "some people are more in charge of [mobility]", while others are "effectively imprisoned by it"[532] also crucial. This socially differentiated mobility and immobility is intimately linked to class, race, gender, sexuality, ability and other socially produced categories and is observable in regard to intra-city movement as well as global migration.

Crucial to socially differentiated mobility within Toronto is a dialectical process of *placemaking* and *displacement*. As some parts of the city are remade both physically and discursively (i.e. developed and simultaneously branded, marketed, promoted), poor and racialized people (who are disproportionately women) are displaced, also both physically and discursively, from those areas. A growing gap between rich and poor is playing out spatially in Toronto. While the downtown core increasingly becomes the territory of the privileged, average

incomes in much of the north of the city have decreased significantly since the 1970s.[533] Middle-income neighbourhoods are disappearing as the city becomes more polarized.[534] Over 50% of the city now consists of low-income neighbourhoods and the residents of these neighbourhoods are disproportionally racialized.[535] The wealthiest neighbourhoods are 84% white.[536] Gentrification of much of Toronto's downtown core continues to displace lower-income people, who can't afford to compete with the rich for housing. Even for tenants with subsidized rent, life in gentrified areas becomes less and less tenable as affordable shopping options and essential services disappear. Gentrification processes also tend to violently displace street-involved people, particularly sex-workers and drug-users.[537] These populations are driven out by new wealthy residents who see them as "undesirable" elements. The City of Toronto actively courts such gentrification, through its Creative City policies, policies aimed at attracting and maintaining a "creative class" which, as critics have pointed out, amounts to "saying that municipalities and regions should reinforce and subsidize their elites."[538]

According to Boudreau, Keil and Young, lack of attention to low-income areas of the city, which they dub the "in-between city," plays out in terms of weaker government, less private investment, minimal mainstream cultural recognition and limited political attention.[539] Despite the fact that the majority of Toronto residents live in the "in-between city," these areas are stigmatized and "residents ... struggle to put their issues- jobs, affordable housing, public transit, policing- on the urban policy agenda."[540] Few stories are told about 'the in-

between city' in the mainstream press, and those that are tend to focus on crime and violence. As it stands, placemaking in Toronto, then, means that some areas of the city, come to be considered *places that matter* (in that they are desirable destinations for development and travel, places that are *on the map*, so to speak) while large swaths of the urban landscape (for the most part outside of the downtown core in Toronto's case) are relegated to the margins in mainstream discourse and policy, treated as more or less irrelevant. These areas are often discursively framed by mainstream media as cultural voids at best and dangerous no-go-zones at worst.

This urban process of simultaneous placemaking and displacement echoes long-standing imperial constructions of global centers and colonial peripheries, and also reinforces the imperialistic, racist and classist narratives about *who counts* that have accompanied these constructions. Undergirding this contemporary process of simultaneous placemaking and displacement within the city are historical processes with global reach. Historically, the majority of migrants who have arrived in Toronto have come to the city due to displacements elsewhere, as economic and political refugees, again reminding us of Massey's distinction between those with relative control of their mobility and those who are compelled or forced to move. The construction of English and French imperial centers motivated the violent displacement of First Nations from the lands on which Canadian cities now stand.[541] And neither are the eviction of poor people from land considered valuable by the elite nor the enclosure of common spaces by the elite or by government new developments. The relationship between

placemaking and displacement is an old one and its contemporary urban iterations have been shaped by these historical legacies. They are the backdrop to spatial politics in Toronto today.

And, while I have just described current conditions in the city of Toronto, much of this is a familiar picture in global cities across North America, though with local manifestations and nuances. I described the place branding and place marketing that has proliferated in response to "creative city" theory in my introductory chapter. As cities today compete for mobile capital through branding and development, the lines drawn between *places that matter* and *places that don't* become ever clearer and the displacement produced by placemaking initiatives in the *places that matter* intensifies.

Global Places and Local Places

It is interesting to note here how Toronto's downtown is discursively associated with globality while other parts of the city are more often than not discursively framed as neighbourhoods or 'communities', i.e. as 'the local'. The City of Toronto's 2003 *Culture Plan for the Creative City* named University Avenue and its surroundings, with the ROM, AGO, Gardiner Museum, Royal Conservatory and other cultural facilities, as a "spectacular boulevard of creativity" and linked investment in this part of the city with putting Toronto on the 'world map'. We must draw a "global creative class", it argues, and to do so must build on our existing institutions.[542] All of the institutions named were in one affluent downtown pocket of the city. A 2011 Toronto Star article, titled "Toronto's finally a world class city*"*, cites "the hotels springing up… the trendy Thompson and the

swish new Le Germain at Maple Leaf Square. The Ritz-Carlton…the Trump and

the Shangri-la and the new Four Seasons."[543] "Divided City: Toronto's Gilded

Age Never Made it to the Suburbs," an article in *Toronto Life Magazine*, states

that "while Toronto's downtown is getting beamed gloriously into the 21st

century, the inner suburbs are living a true-life version of *Groundhog Day:* every

morning people there wake up and it's still 1991."[544] In the meantime, low-income

pockets of the "in-between" city in Toronto, labeled "priority neighbourhoods" by

the municipal government in 2005, are typically "portrayed in terms of

deficiencies: lack of access to services, insufficient 'social infrastructure,' and a

shortage of community space."[545] Critical geographers have pointed out that

designating some areas "priority neighbourhoods":

> essentializes and stigmatizes these neighborhoods, creating an illusion of
> bounded regions in which social "problems" are concentrated and emerge
> from local causation. The logic falsely implies that the problems
> confronted by "priority neighborhoods" are essentially local—thereby
> obscuring the structural dynamics of inequality across the city, the region,
> and other evolving configurations of geographical scale amidst ongoing
> processes of neoliberalization.[546]

These are but a few examples of how Toronto's downtown is equated with

mobility, growth and the future, all associated with the global, while other parts of

the city are relegated to fixedness, the past and the local. These are, of course,

value-laden representations. Building on Massey's work, historian Arif Dirlik has

pointed out the conceptual ambiguities of these very terms, arguing that neither

"global" nor "local" reference any spatial actuality and that the two terms rely on

each other for meaning, as do their parallel terms space and place. Established

as binary oppositions, these terms replicate modern pretensions of universalism

(with the global representing the universal), "relegating the local to subordinate status against the global."[547]

Art festivals and socially engaged artists are actors in this discursive construction of some parts of the city as global and mobile and others as, in juxtaposition, local and rooted. Different types of artistic engagement are encouraged in different parts of the city.[548] 'Mobile', 'temporary,' and 'fleeting' interventions in the city (often undertaken as part of large festivals) are almost without fail initiated downtown. Some examples are the myriads of artistic interventions that make up Scotiablank Nuit Blanche, an annual 'one night only art event' (e.g. Ai Wei Wei's *Forever Bicycles*), art interventions associated with the L'Oreal Luminato Festival (e.g. Kurt Perschke's *red ball*) and interventionist works by urban space activist/artists like Sean Martindale and cARTography Toronto. The 'international' character of these interventions is often emphasized, the fact that artists are 'from elsewhere' is considered a sign that Toronto has made it into a network of global cities. The mobility of the works is celebrated. In contrast, artistic practices undertaken in the 'in-between' city are often emphasized as 'local'. We might think here of the work by companies like *Art Starts, Nomanzland,* and *Regent Park Focus*. The art practices of these companies are as global as any other but they tend to be discursively framed as local, in their own promotional literature, in press coverage and in the grants through which much of this work is funded ('community' arts grants, which prioritize commitment, long-lasting relationships, and local engagement). To be clear, identification of work as 'local' can be a politicized distinction between art

that comes from the margins or the grassroots and art that is imposed (often with

colonial implications). The art practices I've named here are dedicated to profiling

marginalized artists and issues. Nonetheless these associations of mobility and

lack of commitment with some places in the city versus commitment and roots in

others obscure the heterogeneity and power-geometry of both. Critical

geographers Leslie and Hunt have suggested that community arts initiatives in

Toronto's "priority neighbourhoods" help to reinforce the neoliberal city by

insinuating that a lack of infrastructure in these neighbourhoods can be repaired

by strengthening social bonds at a *local* level when, in fact, neoliberal policies are

responsible for the challenges these neighbourhoods face.[549] Massey's calls for

a relational approach to place helps to remind us that all parts of Toronto are

both global and local and within them are varying experiences of privilege and

marginalization. All of these places are both sites of movement and sites of

longstanding traditions. These places are equally contemporary. Naming some of

them as global and others as local has pejorative connotations[550] and is disabling

politically.

Imperial Nostalgias

Toronto's postcoloniality[551] complicates this division between have and have-not

parts of the city that I have named. Geographer Jane M. Jacobs has shown that

"[i]mperial nostalgias…work through place in a multiple register" in contemporary

first world cities with material effects.[552] Through a careful analysis of cultural

politics in London, Jacobs shows that struggles over urban places are

simultaneously struggles through which racialized, classed and gendered identities are shaped and contested. In particular, Jacobs' analysis of battles over the development of the London neighbourhood of Spitalfields, a very poor area of London, occupied primarily by Bengali residents, is useful to consider here. Jacobs not only demonstrates that colonial representations were used to frame Spitalfields as an "unproductive" old space in need of urban "renewal" but also that arguments against new development in Spitalfields drew on the same discursive ploys. According to Jacobs, Spitalfields was represented as "pre-modern", "anti-urban" and "communal" by the Left, even as they made alliances with the Bengali diaspora.[553] In another case study Jacobs shows how Bank Junction in London has been discursively constructed as centre of the English empire and therefore as worthy of preservation.

Jacobs' analysis of postcolonial politics in London resonates in Toronto and serves as a reminder of the relationship between imperialism and the city. The discursive framing of specific places ties into imperial fantasies and continuing postcolonial politics here too. As Toronto continues to divide into increasingly racialized have and have-not areas, with the have-not areas hegemonically framed as less culturally relevant and more 'local' than affluent parts of the downtown, potential for contemporary 'colonization' of the 'peripheries' and the race and class implications of this colonization become evident. As Jacobs reminds us, it is much easier to justify the displacement of local cultures and built forms not popularly considered of value in the first place. This is why artistic practices by arts companies like *Nomanzland*, *Art Starts* and

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Regent Park Focus are vitally important, even as the pejorative implications of identifying this work as 'local' are acknowledged.

Implications for site-specificity: Scale and displacement

In light of the complex urban dynamics I have outlined here it is crucial to look at any site-specific socially engaged project in Toronto at a number of scales simultaneously, and certainly beyond the scale it claims to engage. As I have made clear, many critical community arts projects reframe places that have been traditionally represented as dangerous or culturally irrelevant as vibrant, storied sites. Looking at place relationally, however, suggests that these projects are always tied into discursive frames at a range of scales. In light of this, contesting misrepresentation of a marginalized neighbourhood in Toronto's "in-between city," for example, also necessitates contesting its counterparts, the discursive frames of the city's downtown (i.e. a global place)*.* The risk, otherwise, for example, is that a project about Villaways, a neighbourhood of public housing buildings in northeastern Toronto that is currently the site of an *Art Starts* project (*Up and Rooted,* 2012-), contests misrepresentation on one level and reifies it on another. Without paying attention to relational flows between places, the fact that this neighbourhood is as much a 'global' space as anywhere else in the city can easily be obscured, maintaining Villaways as *local* and *vernacular*, while University Avenue, for example, is framed as *global, cultured* and *contemporary*.[554] In the same vein, *not* taking up the heterogeneity of University Avenue, moving beyond its status as a 'spectacular avenue of the arts' reifies

this space as an uncontested centre of power. University Avenue is also a heterogeneous space, where homeless people warm themselves on subway grates and undocumented workers labour in the kitchens of the restaurants that serve visiting elite. When these spaces are considered in relation to one another hegemonic framings of them become ever clearer and therefore easier to contest.

Thinking relationally about place in Toronto entails thinking about the complicated relationship between *placemaking* and *displacement.* Animation of one place discursively produces other places as well, if inadvertently. When artists animate a particular site it is worthwhile to ask where that site stands in relation to power flows within the city at large. Is it popularly understood as a *place that matters* or as a *place that doesn't*? Is it popularly framed as 'global' or 'local' and what are the implications of this vis-à-vis postcolonial politics? What kinds of displacement are at play?

The argument I am making here is reminiscent of Rosalyn Deutsche's essay *Uneven Development*, in which she shows there is no such thing as a neutral public sphere or neutral public art. In this critical analysis of the role of public art in New York City in the late 1980s, Deutsche framed the city as a place of evictions. The creation of public art in order to augment the so-called 'public sphere', she argued, was used to mask and ameliorate profit-driven initiatives. Deutsche pointed out how art which is supposedly "functional" for "public use" is in fact ideological, marking ostensibly public spaces as spaces for those with money. Deutsche argued for a high "degree of knowledge about urbanism" on

the part of artists and "the astuteness, even stealth, of operation required by public art" if it is to intervene in these politics effectively.[555] The same context of evictions applies to socially engaged processes, the latest trend in public art. It is crucial to look at whether socially engaged artists, as invested as they may be in the 'public' good or 'civic' engagement are masking the uneven development of the city, including the postcolonial implications of this uneven development. Analysis of urban dynamics in Toronto also serves as another reminder that awareness of scale is crucial when analyzing site-specific projects. Some site-specific projects may challenge dominant occupations of place at a neighbourhood level but simultaneously reify national mythology. Others may challenge national identity but reify imperial representations at an urban scale. Any site-specific practice, then, must be considered at a range of scales.

Lens Three: The Politics of Engagement

The first two analytical lenses I've proposed take up related questions of spatial imagination. Massey's work demands that we carefully consider how place is conceptualized and makes it clear that there are more and less progressive ways of thinking about place. My analysis of the dialectical relationship between placemaking and displacement in Toronto provides some key questions to ask of site-specific projects undertaken in this city and begs an awareness of displacement when evaluating any placemaking initiative. Here I turn to evaluative criteria by which to consider the **politics of engagement** at work in socially engaged site-specific projects. Just as spatial imagination shapes the kind of engagement a project pursues, a project's approach to engagement

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also shapes how site is taken up. In this final section I want to argue against a false binary in much of the recent literature on socially engaged art between committed and generative collaborative work (collaborative work which is process-based) on the one hand and, social conflict, dissent and difference on the other. Specifically, I examine widely-cited arguments between Claire Bishop and Grant Kester on the social value of participatory art practices. I argue that both Bishop and Kester do an injustice to agonist political theory, which emphasizes committed democratic practice *premised* on difference and dissent. I then propose a closer look at the concept of solidarity as it is framed by feminist theorists, offering in particular political philosopher Bonnie Honig's concept of 'dilemmatic spaces' as a lens through which to consider the politics of engagement in socially engaged art.

Engaging Face-to-Face: The False Binary between Dialogical Practice and Dissensus

As I discussed in my introduction, the proliferation of local and site-specific practices over the past twenty years has been partially attributed to a prevailing sense of social alienation, which has, in turn, been ascribed to globalization,[556] increasingly virtual relations in the age of the internet,[557] and growing political apathy in what some call a 'post-democratic' age.[558] New art practices that emphasize social relationships, then, are often considered a re-politicization of art, not in terms of formalized politics but in that they engage with the politics of the everyday and seek to foster more meaningful civic networks. There has been

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a spate of new literature examining socially engaged practice from this premise in recent years.[559]

If there is one thing that theorists of socially engaged art practice agree on it is that 'participation' itself does not per se equal meaningful engagement and that the *quality* of participation must be considered. Whichever practices they champion (and, as I will show shortly, they champion very different types of practice), contemporary theorists of socially engaged art agree that participation can function purely as spectacle, can support the status quo rather than contest it and can be harnessed to the purposes of the state and/or capitalist profit.[560] There is an informal consensus that participatory art can at times function as a paternalistic form of service, in which systemic injustices are obscured by an emphasis on the moral transformation of marginalized individuals.[561]

Beyond this point, however, the literature on socially engaged art diverges, becoming both siloed and divisive. First, there is a disconnect between literature in the field of "community art" (often written by community artists themselves) and contemporary art literature (which represents the majority of new publications on this subject). Writing on community art tends to acknowledge a longstanding relationship between art and 'everyday life", rather than frame it as a new phenomenon.[562] While community art has emerged from a range of ideological perspectives (from socialist cultural work, to charity-based practices, to efforts to bring 'high art' to new audiences,) literature in this field usually focuses on the positive relationships, empathic insights and new artistic forms that emerge out of collaborative artistic practices.[563] As I discussed in the

previous chapter, relationship building, deep listening, personal story and reclamation of marginalized cultural practices are core values this field. Because of the diversity of community arts practice there is no clear or agreed-upon evaluative criteria for work in this field. However, the extent to which an artistic practice is committed to relationship-building and, the ethics of the relationships established between collaborators are typically the kind of evaluative criteria by which community art is judged.[564]

The community art literature is rich in insights and is particularly valuable in that it often emerges out of artistic practice, making it nuanced and specific. The field of community art, however, has been tarnished by pointed, and now widespread, critique. Critics have: highlighted the structural pressures on community-based artists to develop patronizing relationships with marginalized groups[565]; shown how superficial approaches to cultural difference can in fact reify colonial constructions,[566] and; argued that community art can be deeply implicated in the reduction of the welfare state (standing in as a kind of 'replacement' social welfare).[567] In light of this, many contemporary art theorists are quick to distinguish between community art (which many now consider retrograde) and emergent socially engaged practices, which, they argue, reject pretenses of unity and community in favour of temporary, provisional coalitions.[568] Contemporary art literature tends to treat socially engaged art as a relatively new phenomenon, while acknowledging historical precedents like Dada, the Situationists and 1960s Happenings.

From here, contemporary art literature diverges even further, breaking into polarized factions. Finkelpearl notes that "critics who champion activist, cooperative art practices look to theorists like Habermas and Freire as well as to the dialogical practices of activist political organizations for their theoretical horizons" while "writers like Kwon, Deutsche, and Bishop have attacked the political theoretical legitimacy of this position, often in the name of European postmodern writers like Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Ranciere, and Jean-Francois Lyotard."[569] Indeed, some theorists champion work that is 'open-ended', 'generative', and entwined in broader social movements and processes, while others (like Kwon and Bishop) are critical of such work, claiming that it is ultimately premised on a search for (false) consensus and an erasure of difference. Performance theorist Shannon Jackson names the current polarizations in the literature as: "1) social celebration versus social antagonism; (2) legibility versus illegibility; (3) radical functionality versus radical unfunctionality; and (4) artistic heteronomy versus artistic autonomy."[570]

I want to specifically turn here to arguments for and against 'open ended' collaborative practices as they take up questions of dissent and difference. Drawing on publications by Claire Bishop and Grant Kester[571] I will discuss what I see as a false binary in these publications between extended dialogue, collaboration, commitment and face-to-face-social relationships on one hand, and; conflict, difference, rupture and contradiction on the other. This binary is, unfortunately, symptomatic in the current literature, beyond publications by Bishop and Kester. To my mind, a distinction between what Kester calls

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"dialogical practices" (practices which emphasize extended open-ended collaboration) and critical approaches to power, conflict, difference and contradiction, misunderstands the radical potential of participatory art practices.[572]

Claire Bishop and Antagonism

Art historian Claire Bishop sparked a firestorm with her 2004 article "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." In it Bishop took curator Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* to task for lauding work that is "open-ended, interactive, and resistant to closure, often appearing to be 'work-in-progress' rather than a completed object."[573] Premising his arguments on 1990s art practices like those of Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija (amongst many), Bourriaud had identified a new turn in art toward face-to-face interactions and collective meaning-making. *Relational Aesthetics* focused on how artists like Gillick and Tiravanija established social situations through their works, situations that relied on the participation of the audience for meaning. Bishop critiqued Bourriaud's emphasis on the creation of "convivial relationships"[574] and "microtopias"[575] in what he called "relational art", arguing that the works Bourriaud described (Tiravanija's dinner parties in galleries, for example) avoided "debate and dialogue" and were therefore failures as democratic experiments. They are "political only in the loosest sense of advocating dialogue over monologue…The content of this dialogue is not in itself democratic."[576]

"Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" and Bishop's subsequent works (most notably her 2006 article "The Social Turn and its Discontents") articulate a number of different but related critiques of participatory work. I have already partially reviewed Bishop's concerns in Chapter Three but it is worth briefly reiterating them here. First, Bishop goes to great lengths to show that participation is not necessarily democratic or politically progressive, an argument that (as I have already noted) is now widely accepted in the literature on socially engaged art, if not in on-the-ground practices. Another key concern for Bishop is the extent to which relational art is entwined with other social processes. She is both critical of artistic collusion with neoliberal states in dismantling social welfare systems and/or obscuring structural inequities and, disturbed that the criteria by which relational art is judged is premised on "political and even ethical" concerns[577] rather than aesthetic ones. Bishop sees the potential of these practices as largely symbolic and argues that art is useful in its simultaneous intelligibility and unintelligibility (she draws on the work of Jacques Ranciere here). The ways in which art can speak contradiction and can illuminate contradictory relationships is of great value to Bishop, and she finds Bourriaud's criteria for judgment of socially engaged art (which includes asking questions like: "Does this art allow me to enter into dialogue?"[578]) inadequate.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Bishop's greatest concern, which runs throughout her published work, is with whether collaborative practices evade or engage with social conflict. Bishop juxtaposes the artistic practices of Santiago Sierra, Thomas Hirschorn and other artists whose work she finds compelling with

the "feel good" relational art described by Bourriaud and others. The artists she

prefers produce tightly authored works, in which their "collaborators", perhaps

better described as participants, are given limited or highly scripted roles. Bishop

not only thinks that this makes their work better artistically but also approves of

their emphasis on conflict. Of Sierra and Hirschorn, she writes: "The relations

produced by their performances and installations are marked by sensations of

unease and discomfort rather than belonging, because the work acknowledges

the impossibility of a "micro-topia" and instead *sustains* a tension among viewers,

participants, and context."[579] In fact, throughout Bishop's work, she makes it clear

that she is a proponent of art that is antagonistic. Shannon Jackson points out

that Bishop is consistent "in the language she uses to describe the projects she

favors":

> Most of the descriptive terms used- whether dramatizing Hirschhorn or
> Sierra, Phil Collins, Artur Zmijewski, or others- have a similar ring. They
> are "tougher, more disruptive"; they create "difficult- sometimes
> excruciating- situations"; they provoke "discomfort and frustration." They
> may appear "uncomfortable and exploitive"; they "sustain tension" and are
> sometimes "staggeringly hard."[580]

As Bishop herself put it, she values art that "expos[es] that which is repressed in

sustaining the semblance of… harmony."[581]

In order to argue for antagonism's democratic value, Bishop draws on

philosopher Jacques Ranciere's contention that art is "a key site where

disagreement can be staged in order to produce new communities of sense" and

that aesthetics are "the ability to think contradiction."[582] Bishop also draws on the

radical democratic theory of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, particularly their

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1985 treatise *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. In this text Laclau and Mouffe articulate a theory of democratic agonism, which critiques liberal democracy's ultimate goal of social consensus, positing instead that dissensus is critical to democracy.

I will outline the contours of agonist theory shortly but at this point the details of Bishop's arguments as to why conflict is a critical artistic foci are less important than the binary she establishes between critical explorations of social conflict and prolonged collaborative processes. As I have already reviewed via Harvey and Massey's work, as well as Kwon's critiques of new genre public art, Bishop's concern about the erasure of difference and the futility (if not damaging repercussions) of socially engaged art practices premised on commonality are well-founded. What is curious, and ultimately very frustrating, however, is that Bishop uses these arguments to dismiss committed dialogue and co-authored artistic processes in favour of projects in which the moment of engagement is limited; a form of response to a highly authored performance or installation. Arguing against the artistic renunciation of authorship in collaborative practices, Bishop rejects work that is process-based, "open-ended" or premised on co-produced knowledge. She applauds the fact that "Sierra delimits from the outset his choice of invited participants and the context in which the event takes place"[583] and commends "[t]he independent stance that Hirschhorn asserts in his work."[584] The fact that "though produced collaboratively, [Hirschorn's] art is the product of a single artist's vision"[585] is part of what makes it artistically valuable for Bishop. Bishop also applauds Sierra and Hirschorn for their disinterest in

compromise or mutual understanding. The fact that Sierra's work does not achieve "reconciliation" is what makes it interesting, as is Hirschorn's reduction of his audience to "hapless intruders."[586] Bishop is suspicious, it seems, of any form of coming together or compromise.

Bishop's writing emphasizes a binary between shared artistic processes and dissent or contradiction. Her critiques reduce collaborative processes that are generative, open-ended or dialogical to ineffectual forms of social service, devoid of debate or *difficult* dialogue. She negates the possibility that collaborative processes of meaning-making can be sites of *productive* strife, that dialogue which shapes temporary or even long-term communities can be difficult, conflict laden, disruptive or any of the important things she thinks participatory art practices ought to be. Bishop, it seems, can only conceive of audience in a traditional sense (as those who receive a pre-determined object or experience) and is unable to engage productively with work that blurs the lines between artist/audience through processes of extended collaboration and shared authorship.

While she doesn't explicitly say it, Bishop effectively forecloses the possibility that collaborative artistic processes can function as spaces of contradiction. She is, instead, dismissive of a focus on "dynamic and sustained relationships" in socially engaged art.[587] Bishop equates empathy with "transcendence" and "smooth[ing] over,"[588] rather than acknowledging the possibility that the greatest empathy might come not from one-off disruptive experiences but from prolonged dialogue in which individuals focus precisely on

their differences and come to realize their own partiality. Here, Bishop throws the baby out with the bathwater. This is precisely the radical potential of socially engaged artistic practice.

As I have mentioned, much of Bishop's argument for practices that highlight social antagonisms is premised on agonist theory, particularly the work of Chantal Mouffe.[589] As I will show, however, Bishop places too much emphasis on antagonism in her use of Mouffe's ideas and not enough on the goal of agonism. The premise of agonist theory, in fact, is that, while total agreement can never (and should never) be reached, social relations can *move* towards greater justice as individuals become aware of their own epistemological limits. Bishop appears to be less interested in this movement than in isolated moments of individual discomfort. As Shannon Jackson puts it in her critique of Bishop's work: "[t]he 'discomfort' between art and receiver becomes the force worthy of critical interest; if such an encounter does produce an antagonistic experience of 'the limits of objectivity,' that effect is sidelined by her language's oppositional fixation on whether it is 'staggeringly hard.'"[590]

Grant Kester on Dialogical Art

Like Bishop, Grant Kester has become an authority on collaborative art. He has also become Bishop's most vociferous interlocutor. The author of *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), *The One and the Many: Contemporary Art in a Global Context* (2011) and numerous articles and public presentations on this subject,[591] Kester is particularly interested in "site-

specific collaborative projects that unfold through extended interaction and shared labor, and in which the process of participatory interaction itself is treated as a form of creative praxis."[592] *Conversation Pieces* looks at projects by Suzanne Lacy, Loraine Leeson, WochenKlausur, Helen and Newton Harrison and others, to develop the concept of "dialogical art", art practices in which empathic listening across social differences is emphasized and new social relationships are produced. *The One and the Many* draws on the work of collectives like Park Fiction, Ala Plastica and Dialogue to argue for the value of artistic practice premised on creative shared labour toward local acts of social change. While I cannot plumb Kester's work for all of its nuances here, I want to point out how, even as Kester champions contemporary generative practices for their potential for social change, he also contributes to the binary between prolonged engagement and social conflict that Bishop creates. I will briefly outline how Kester contributes to this binary here.

In a number of his publications, Kester goes to great lengths to distinguish between an avant-garde approach to social engagement, which emphasizes shock as a catalyst for critical perception (and therefore social change) and the process-based practices he admires. Drawing on a wide range of theory, Kester argues that while avant-garde art and dialogical art both seek to produce "new and different forms of experience"[593] avant-garde art assumes that the artist possesses critical capacities not yet available to his audience while dialogical practices respect the knowledge of their participants. Avant-garde art makes

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statements while dialogical practices are premised on listening.[594] Dialogical

practices have the power to produce:

> collaboratively generated insight… In the exchange that follows, both the artist and his or her collaborators will have their existing perceptions challenged…What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalyzed through the collaborative production of a given project.[595]

In *Conversation Pieces* Kester proposes an analytical framework with

which to evaluate dialogical art. According to Kester, critics of these practices

must remain aware of the legacy of urban reform and its racialized and classed

paternalism because community art (much of which is 'dialogical art') "draws

both consciously and unconsciously" on this legacy.[596] In urban reform

movements, Kester points out, white middle-class 'do-gooders' attempted to

ameliorate social conditions in poor neighbourhoods by working on the moral

character of their residents, rather than fighting systemic oppressions. Armed

with critical awareness of this history, Kester argues, critics should neither evade

questions of social difference nor reify artists who share class or ethnic

background with their participants as somehow more authentic or politically

aware. Instead, he contends, we should judge each project on a case-by-case

basis vis-à-vis its awareness or contestation of social privilege. In a detailed

analysis of New Orleans artist Dawn Deveaux's work with young, black men in

the prison system, Kester provides a useful and insightful example of how

dialogical practices can be critically evaluated along these lines.

Where Kester misses the point in *Conversation Pieces*, however, is not in how he *critiques* certain artistic practices but in how he *allots praise* for the artistic practices he likes (those of Suzanne Lacy, WochenKlausur and other dialogical artists). In his advocacy for the listening-based practices of these artists Kester focuses on their ability to find common ground between participants occupying different social positions. Kester makes his case for dialogical art by drawing on Habermas' theory of discursive communication, in which individuals come together in a public sphere to engage in rational debate about issues of the common good. While Kester carefully acknowledges feminist critiques of Habermas' assertion that "material and social difference" can be 'bracketed' in order that everyone can speak in the public sphere,[597] Kester focuses only on inclusivity in terms of cultural difference (race, class, gender, etc.) evading difficult questions regarding the inclusion of conflictual perspectives. His use of Habermas is symptomatic of his emphasis on the ways in which dialogical practices can foster social consensus, shared solutions to social problems, and empathetic identification. He writes: "A dialogical aesthetic…does not claim to provide, or require…universal or objective foundation. Rather it is based on the generation of a local consensual knowledge that is only provisionally binding and that is grounded instead at the level of collective interaction."[598] Kester does not consider *who* makes up the local and what is elided in order to achieve such consensus. Nor does he take up *how* dissenting perspectives are engaged through artistic practice but focuses rather on the achievement of consensus, which he assumes as a sign of success in dialogical work.

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In his recent book, *The One and the Many,* Kester continues to emphasize consensus and commonality rather than dissent and difference. As I have already outlined in the first half of this chapter, this book emphasizes "a pragmatic openness to site and situation" through which artists "cultivate and enhance local forms of solidarity…"[599] Kester praises collectives like Ala Plastica and Park Fiction for their ability to engage in open-ended collaboration with 'local' residents in order to arrive at solutions to local problems. In contrast to these collaborative practices Kester critiques work by Sierra, Hirschorn and other artists that Bishop champions for their emphasis on antagonism. Kester wades through a lengthy art history here to show that such work is ultimately condescending to its audience. Leaving aside the merits of that argument, what is frustrating is that in order to make his arguments Kester enforces a binary between collaborative practices and dissensus. For example, Kester critiques poststructural theory (upon which so much avant-garde disruptive work is premised) for privileging: "dissensus over consensus, rupture and immediacy over continuity and duration, and distance over proximity, intimacy or integration."[600] Rather than challenge these binaries, Kester also appears to assume dissensus as incompatible with continuity, duration or intimacy.

While Kester's critique of avant-garde practices troubles Kant's "account of the aesthetic," in which "to perceive objects aesthetically we must rise above our specific identities as subjects (our desires or "interests") and see things from a point of view that is universal,"[601] he ultimately assumes that participants and artists in socially engaged art will do this as well, by eliding the *processes* by

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which dissenting perspectives are navigated in socially engaged art. As Kim

Charnley points out, Kester's

> depiction of dialogue always tends to emphasize understanding without addressing a preceding conflict of perspectives – especially those between the artist and the participants in a given work. Any conflict in perspectives tends to be subsumed in the question of inequalities of power and representation, and therefore becomes implicitly a danger to be avoided. Or, conflict is represented as an agonistic stand-off where 'delegates and representatives [are] charged with defending a priori positions' (Kester 2004: 111). There seems to be no space here to view conflict, as 'dissensus', as a necessary condition of the political.[602]

Kester's avoidance of the question of social conflict neglects the *artistry* involved

in dialogical practice, the very art of bringing different perspectives into one

space and finding ways to engage with conflicts between them. While Kester

could choose to advocate for dialogical artistic practices on the basis of their

potential to engage productively with social tensions and conflict, he instead

reinforces Bishop's distinction between co-authored process-based work and

work that refuses to overwrite conflicting perspectives. While the dialogical

practices he champions, at least in *Conversation Pieces*, begin precisely with

conflictual perspectives, Kester skims over the art of engaging these

perspectives to focus only on the consensus at which participants arrive. Must

we consider dialogical practices a failure if they do not achieve consensus or

recognition of the self in the other?

Moving Beyond Binaries

Elinor Heartney has pointed out that "[i]n the end, Bishop and Kester are asking

the same questions: What kind of progressive change is possible in the current

environment? And what can artists do to facilitate that change?"[603] In light of these important questions, the binary each of these scholars establishes between extended dialogue and dissensus is unfortunate. In fact, the radical potential of localized practice (face-to-face engagement) is precisely in its ability to engage dissent and difference through shared practice and the development of committed relationships. While Bishop laments that today's socially engaged practices are less interested in "a relational *aesthetic* than the creative rewards of collaborative activity"[604] the potential reward of collaborative activity *is* deep engagement with social conflict, contradiction and difference- the very values Bishop espouses. A short review of agonist democratic theory along with a brief discussion of feminist approaches to solidarity shows a different way of thinking about dialogical processes, a way of thinking that illuminates the potential of process-based practices insofar as it they can engage productively with social conflict.

Agonism not Antagonism

Where Bishop goes wrong in her use of agonist theory is in her emphasis on antagonism as an end point rather than on antagonism's value for social change. A short review of the key premises of agonist theory, particularly as articulated by Chantal Mouffe (Bishop's key reference on this subject)[605] and feminist agonist theorist Bonnie Honig,[606] helps to elaborate this point.

Agonist theorists posit that conflict is the essence of politics and propose democratic alternatives to liberalism (and communism) premised on this idea.

While difference of opinion has always been a key focus of liberalism[607] agonist theorists take issue with liberalism's ultimate quest for social harmony and consensus. Arguing that liberalism and materialist socialism, while very different political theories, are similarly flawed in their idealist visions of a future society without conflict, agonists argue that it is in fact impossible to eliminate conflict from the social realm and propose instead a vision of democratic politics in which conflict is always understood to be present. Drawing on poststructuralist critiques of foundationalism, they argue that consensus is in fact a myth, as it is always premised on the suppression of different ideologies. Mouffe writes: "Forms of agreement can be reached but they are always partial and provisional since consensus is by necessity based on acts of exclusion."[608]

Mouffe frames her work as radical pluralism, in opposition to total pluralism. According to Mouffe, total pluralism (in which difference is considered irreconcilable and the goal is, therefore, to manage difference) is pluralism without politics, and lacks an analysis of power relations. Without the recognition that rights for some people have been constructed on the basis of the subordination of other people, Mouffe argues, pluralism evades the political. Radical pluralism, on the other hand, is a relational approach, which acknowledges that for every gain in human rights, there are yet other rights that have not been achieved. A healthy democracy is one in which struggles for those remaining rights can then be brought to the fore and the cycle of contestation continues. For radical pluralists the realization of the liberal or materialist socialist dream of a society without conflict would signify the end of democracy.[609]

For agonists, then, a focus on difference is not so much about the fact of pluralism (eg. of cultural difference vis-à-vis race, class, gender or other social categories) but about the legitimation of conflict and dissent. A pluralism of perspectives and demands should be seen, they argue, not as a roadblock for democracy to overcome, but as a resource for social equality, as a set of contestations that will continue to push society toward greater social justice. Mouffe writes: "Any social objectivity is ultimately political and has to show the traces of the acts of exclusion that govern its constitution- what, following Derrida, can be referred to as its "constitutive outside."[610]

Another way to frame the inevitability of conflict as framed by agonists, is to say that if all political claims are particular, power cannot be eliminated from any political assertion. In light of this assertion, the question is how to constitute power in democratic ways. Agonists reject the concept of a universal good and instead argue that arenas of contestation are vital. A vibrant democracy is one in which struggles and contestations can come to the fore. Movements towards justice are critical but for agonists justice is ever-evolving, an emergent concept, as different groups continue to make new claims. In fact, in the process of making each claim, new subjectivities emerge, pointing to the need for ever more expansive concepts of justice. Agonist theory is premised on the concept of the fluid subject. Abandoning the fiction of the bounded and autonomous individual is crucial for Mouffe. Mouffe argues that if people have a multiplicity of subject positions to draw on, political frontiers that (temporarily) unite people as radical

democratic citizens can be more easily developed, thereby increasing the possibility of more just social arrangements.[611]

Contrary to what Bishop's writing might lead us to believe, agonist theory is *not* dismissive of temporary solidarities or coalitions. While Bishop's writing emphasizes the sustenance of social conflict, it underemphasizes agonist theory's interest in counter-hegemonic formations that come together *through* dissent, in difference as a *resource* for temporary agreements and the production of new subjectivities. While an *antagonistic* approach wants to defeat or eliminate perspectives that are incompatible, to achieve ideological supremacy for one perspective over another, an *agonist* approach appreciates dissent as a component of a vibrant public sphere. The focus of agonist theory is on *movement*, the possibility that positions and subjectivities can and will shift through exposure to dissenting perspectives. Engaging with conflict makes us aware of the limits of our own 'objectivity'. Individual subjectivities, which themselves are composed of contradictions and 'dilemmas'[612] shift through interaction with each other. Definitions of the social good progress through these interactions.

While Bishop is suspicious of prolonged interaction, commitment and, it seems, face-to-face forms of dialogue, agonist theorist Bonnie Honig reminds us that "to affirm the perpetuity of the contest is *not* to celebrate a world without points of stabilization; it is to affirm the reality of perpetual contest, even within an ordered setting, and to identify the affirmative dimension of contestation."[613] It is through contestation that groups and individuals become aware of their own

partiality and can arrive at new forms of empathy or compromise (which themselves will always bear the traces of their partiality and will then be subject to new contestations).

Agonism in Practice: Solidarity and 'Dilemmatic Spaces'

Talk of 'coalitions' and 'solidarity' is increasingly replacing references to the (ever-suspicious) concept of 'community' in contemporary art literature. But in-depth considerations of how solidarity functions are conspicuously absent in this literature. We can overcome the binary between committed dialogue and acknowledgment of social conflict in this literature with even a brief review of feminist literature on solidarity. While the concept of solidarity has a complex history that cannot be addressed adequately here, I would like to identify three key elements of solidarity identified in feminist theory. These are:

1) Commitment to social relationships even as distinct positions and differences are acknowledged.

2) Recognition of interdependence and relationality.

In combination, these facets of solidarity lead us away from the false binary between committed collaboration and conflict.

In feminist theory, solidarity is framed precisely as a committed and reciprocal relationship that weathers the storm of difference and difficulties. Feminist theorist Sharon Welch describes solidarity in this way:

> Solidarity has two aspects…granting each group sufficient respect to listen to their ideas and to be challenged by them; recognition that the lives of the various groups are so intertwined that each is accountable to the other. These forms of recognition assume working together to bring about changes in social practice.[614]

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As Welch points out, without commitment to a relationship even when it is challenging, solidarity loses its transformative potential. In the face of confrontation people are more likely to retreat into groups where differences between members are less overt but in a relationship of solidarity people are willing to meet resistance from one another.[615] Feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty emphasizes the importance of listening for differences. She suggests that within solidarity "[d]iversity and difference are central values…to be acknowledged and respected."[616] Like Welch, Mohanty argues for solidarity based on a choice to struggle together rather than based on a common experience of oppression. Indeed the notion of a *committed* community of choice is often associated with solidarity in feminist literature. bell hooks writes: "Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs, and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment."[617] Without openness to distinct perspectives, and even conflict, the concept of communities of choice might invoke the familiar critique of community as 'mythic unity.'[618] A chosen community that does not embrace conflict is just as likely to suppress dissent and eradicate difference as one that is not chosen. But, sophisticated arguments for solidarity and communities of choice reflect an awareness of how important contradictions and conflict are. Jacqui Alexander, for example, argues for community premised on shifting identities. She writes: "The fact of the matter

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is that there is no other work but the work of creating and re-creating ourselves within the context of community."[619] While bell hooks has fought for the importance of caucuses for marginalized groups (homeplaces in which to organize and identify key goals) she also emphasizes the importance of disagreement within solidarity. "If women always seek to avoid confrontation, to always be 'safe,' we may never experience any revolutionary change, any transformation, individually or collectively", she writes.[620] Viewed in this way, communities premised on a choice to struggle together can be understood as emergent and open to dissent, proposing a similar vision to that of radical democratic theorists.

As Massey does in her work on place, transnational feminists also emphasize a relational approach to solidarity, an approach that considers the ways in which power flows globally and that challenges these flows. As Alexander reminds her readers, a transnational approach is not merely a "theoretical option….[O]ur standard of living here, indeed our very survival, is based on the raw exploitation of working-class women, white, black, and Third World in all parts of the world."[621] When framed this way solidarity is less a choice than a responsibility to a relationship that exists whether it is chosen or not. This could be understood as a sense of community premised on shared global circuits of production, consumption, and power, reminiscent of the progressive sense of place proposed by Massey.

In tandem with feminist iterations of solidarity, agonist theorist Bonnie Honig's concept of 'dilemmatic spaces' provides a particularly useful lens through

which to consider the politics of engagement at work in any socially engaged art practice. In *Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home* (1994) Honig argues that "[d]ilemmas- situations in which two values, obligations or commitments conflict and there is no right thing to do- pose the question of difference and the ineradicability of conflict in a specific and ordinarily familiar setting."[622] Moral subjects (individuals) and social groups, Honig argues, are in fact always in dilemmatic spaces, as they are constituted socially, "along conflictual axes of identity/difference such that [their] agency itself is constituted by and daily mired in dilemmatic choices and negotiations."[623] The whole "terrain of existence" is a dilemmatic space, through which we struggle, making one identity claim over another, prioritizing one moral choice at the expense of another. Honig draws on the work of feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis to argue that one has no choice but to confront dilemma when acting in the world, as retreating to a safe and stable home space (free of dilemma) is simply not an option. As we are always entangled in the social field the question is not *whether* to be involved in social change but *how.* The question for individuals or groups is how to "position themselves given their complicity with and resistance to the discourses, practices, and institutions they seek to overcome or transform?"[624]

While we have a strong psychic attachment to the false premise of a homeplace to which we can retreat, Honig argues, to consciously engage in the risky 'dilemmatic' space that in fact constitutes social experience can be rewarding in that it forces us to challenge social constructs and leads to a relational sense of justice. Drawing on feminist Bernice Johnson Reagon's writing

on coalitional work, Honig reminds us that working in coalition is not easy- it can involve discomfort, unease and the dissolution of foundational beliefs. So, too, she argues must home be thought of as a 'dilemmatic space'. "If home is to be a positive force in politics, it must itself be recast in coalitional terms as the site of necessary, nurturing, but also strategic, conflicted, and temporary alliances."[625] To search for home as a constant or safe space, either within the self or within a group, is misguided, as all subjects have multiple axes of identity (formed both by and *against* structural identities). 'Home' is always a dilemmatic space. Dilemmatic spaces, however, are useful precisely because they are contradictory. They are sites from which to question and overcome normative concepts (gender, for example). They belie foundationalism and are therefore open subjects to new ideas and subjectivities.

Dilemmatic spaces are sites of optimism for Honig, who argues that coming together need not per se be antagonistic, though it may be at times. Importantly, Honig recognizes the importance of hooks' (1995) argument for homeplaces in which marginalized groups can gather to self-identify and affirm shared worldviews but she suggests that even gatherings premised on shared experience or history must be understood as provisional and conflicted alliances. Honig argues that we ought not to reject home altogether, but to remember that, be it within the self, in a small group of seemingly similar people, or within a broader 'community', home is always a politicized space with internal differences. If home is conceptualized in this way it can be a hopeful site of coalition for alternative politics. Honig says of agonism:

There is always an ongoing contestation, some of it in defence of historical achievements such as the welfare state, but agonism is not per se always oppositional or inherently contestational. It just anticipates resistance to all efforts to institute and maintain equality or justice. I argued in my first book that even the best of such efforts always generate remainders and so we agonists must also be attentive to those and aware that a further politics must follow to redress that. Thus, agonists hope that we can experience political engagement with pleasure and joy as well as the attending frustration that always comes with the friction of life in common.[626]

Socially Engaged Art as Dilemmatic Space

Grant Kester says: "I've always felt that the power of art rested in its ability to evoke utopian possibilities."[627] In contrast to this, I propose analysis of the ways in which art can work productively within what are, inevitably, dilemmatic spaces to foster social relationships, shared places and practices (in other words the very act of coming together). How can artists foster dilemmatic coalitions, in which there may be joy but subjectivities are also stretched? Herein, I think, lies both the *artistry* and the political potential of participatory art. Collaborative artistic practices have the ability to speak the contradictions that Bishop values. They can be shaped as places of risk, out of which radical new subjectivities and understandings can emerge. Bernice Johnson Reagon says that you know you're doing real coalition work when feel like you "might keel over at any minute and die", when "you feel threatened to the core."[628] At times involvement in a socially engaged art project may feel like this. At other times it may be less painful and more pleasurable. Dilemmatic spaces are not easy, automatically comfortable or safe. Nor are they spaces to which one can simply retreat to be nurtured. But at times they can be optimistic and joyful spaces. As Honig says:

If you want to retreat from the political, agonist theory is disturbing, as there is no retreat. But, if you aspire to forms of life in common constellated around public things, in affectively charged ways that are both pleasurable and sometimes infuriating, built around finding, promoting and building shared public objects, engaged in some common cause, but not disciplined into oppressive forms of normalisation, then agonistic politics is very optimistic."[629]

Bishop asks: "If the aesthetic is dangerous, isn't that all the more reason it should be interrogated?"[630] We might ask the same of open-ended collaborative practices. Certainly, there is the danger that they will elide difference, shut down dissent and become closed communities. But the concept of dilemmatic space provides a lens through which to consider if and how they do this. It is to the potential of collaborative art practices to foster dilemmatic space even as they bring people together that I think we should turn. This moves analysis beyond simple identity politics but does not abdicate difficult questions of power, privilege and difference.

Coming Full Circle: Dilemmatic Space and Progressive Place

It can be argued, in fact, that dilemmatic space is another iteration of Massey's progressive sense of place. It is a form of coming together that is always contested, always partial, always difficult and power-riddled but not to be abandoned. It is open, always 'in the process of becoming' but is not premised on erasure of difference. This is a useful lens through which look at socially engaged art practices in that it is not premised on weak distinctions between genres (wholesale critiques of community art, for example) but rather looks at the contributions of these practices to a democratic sphere specifically, on a case-by-

case basis. As I have shown in my chapter on REPOhistory, art practices rarely

fall neatly into one genre of social engagement and, as social processes, they

are inherently riddled with contradictions. Looking at socially engaged art

practices through the lens of 'dilemmatic space' allows us to differentiate

between open-ended collaboratively produced forms of knowledge. Whether

knowledge is co-produced premised on homogeny or through engagement with

difference becomes key. It is not enough to argue for dialogical practices in

themselves as the fact of their dialogical form alone is not what makes them

interesting. What is interesting is when they foster dialogue premised on

dilemma, difference and dissent. Armed with the concept of dilemmatic space we

can return to much of the literature on community based art and its useful

elaborations on the importance of listening and "connective aesthetics."[631] This

allows us to judge these practices as art, for their aesthetic choices and the

affects they produce. Do they recognize place as a dilemmatic space? Do they

foster the political potential of dilemmatic space? How do they stretch the

subjectivities of the artists, participants and audiences involved?

Conclusion

As I argued earlier in this chapter, the challenge before today's site-specific

socially engaged artists is to do two potentially contradictory things

simultaneously; to anchor social relations (in the local) and to dislodge polarized

positions, politics and everyday life as conceived under global capitalism. Many

socially engaged artists today see their work as counter-hegemonic. They do not

seek to reaffirm hegemonic narratives but rather to contest dominant narratives

and practices of place. The criteria I have outlined in this chapter can help us assess the extent to which they accomplish this. Site-specific socially engaged practices are altering the symbolic associations with particular places and face-to-face relationships within these places. But to what end? Taken in combination I believe that the criteria of **spatial imagination, relational specificity** and **politics of engagement** allow us to assess the criticality of site-specific participatory art practices. I do not propose these criteria as a checklist. All practices have their blindspots and shortcomings, functioning counter-hegemonically in some ways and hegemonically in others. And taking up a progressive politics of place, a relational approach to place as it pertains to Toronto, and social engagement as a dilemmatic space are tall orders. What these criteria do allow for though, is resuscitation of the political dimensions of site-specific collaborative art practices. Any given project could be assessed in terms of one of these criteria alone. I draw on all three to analyze my following two case studies: *Bridge of One Hair* and *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY*.

Chapter Five - "Out of Place"[632]: Jumblies

Theatre's *Bridge of One Hair*

"Jumblies Theatre makes art, with, for and about the people and places of Toronto….We say everyone is welcome and grapple with the implications – aesthetic, social and practical – of trying to mean it."[633]

"If you focus too narrowly on just the place you're leaving out a lot of what's meaningful to people- what's in their imagination and their memory, what is absent…. Unless you're really going to revise how you're looking at Canada and Canadian history, by dwelling on local history you're actually limiting and leaving more out than by avoiding it."[634]

> Ruth Howard, Artistic Director of Jumblies Theatre

In the spotlight on risers above the audience, stands a young Aboriginal man. He begins to speak: **"***Old Woman, I know who you are. I know this barren wasteland on which I stand was once a forest.***"** The orchestra starts to play as he continues: **"***And you, old woman, had life and beauty, energy and passion, love and abundance, freedom and chatter with the gods.***"** He speaks the words over again, as the chorus sings, hauntingly, mournfully. The children's chorus rejoins: "*Sleep in my arms. Make a pillow for your head.*" And then the female soloist, followed by the male: *"I miss my country's unsullied green grass. It's cool breeze and soft sand. My country. My country*". The adult chorus rejoins again: "*Could you see what I see? Waters forming shining pools. Soft winds fluttering our flag. Crops grow and trees show their buds. Now all those, who from the flames of war, scattered overseas, come home alive."* Through the white curtains that surround the circular stage and the audience, step dozens of people, as many as one hundred men, women and children, of mixed races and ages. More yet fill the centre of the stage. An older Somali woman, on a riser across from the Aboriginal orator recites, projecting her voice powerfully: **"***Waxaan ku riyooday,*

waddankaygiyoo raja leh." The Somali man standing beside her roughly

translates: "I dreamed that there was peace in my country." They bow their

heads. Cymbals sound and then there is silence. The lights go down.

Thus ended *Bridge of One Hair,* an original musical production written by

Ruth Howard and produced by her community arts company *Jumblies Theatre* in

2007 (directed by Faye Dupras, musical score by Alice Ping Yee Ho).[635] The

production's run at Toronto's *Harbourfront Centre* as part of the *New World*

Stage festival was the culmination of an ambitious multi-year project undertaken

in partnership with a local history museum, *Montgomery's Inn*. While *Bridge of*

One Hair was performed in downtown Toronto, the vast majority of the project

took place in a residential area in Toronto's west end, drawing on and

contributing to multiple, unique senses of place and social relationships in that

area. This project engaged hundreds of residents in participatory art processes

upon which much of the original script, musical score, imagery and design for the

final production were based.

In this chapter I examine the *Bridge of One Hair* project (Toronto, 2004-

2008) in light of Massey's calls for a progressive reconceptualization of place

(outlined in Chapter Four). I discuss the local politics of place into which *Bridge of*

One Hair entered and show the dependence of these politics on a specific

historical narrative and a restrictive conception of place. I then discuss how

Bridge of One Hair challenged a local politics of place by drawing on different

narratives and cultural forms. I trace some key ways in which the project

embodied a geographical imagination closely aligned with Massey's. As I noted

in Chapter Four, Massey has lamented that such an imagination of place (as fluid and shaped through interrelations) is "now both frequently rehearsed in theory and just as frequently ignored in practice."[636] *Bridge of One Hair* offers a chance to think carefully about the potential practice of such a geographical imagination in site-specific participatory art practices.

After examining *Bridge of One hair* in light of the "progressive sense of place" proposed by Massey, I contrast the ways in which this project operated at a neighbourhood scale, a city-wide scale and a national scale. I argue that *Bridge of One Hair* significantly contested dominant perceptions and practices of place at a local scale even as it ran the risk of reinforcing a national mythology of untroubled multiculturalism for audience members who had not been part of or privy to the production process. I also argue that, given increasing spatial polarization in Toronto, the fact that the final production was staged at the *Harbourfront Centre* made it difficult for this final production to challenge dominant assumptions regarding which parts of the city are culturally important and which are *not*, though the project had significantly challenged those assumptions up to that point. I end the chapter with some reflections on how *Bridge of One Hair* fostered what Honig calls a 'dilemmatic space' for the different layers of participants in the project (lead artists, key collaborators, residents of the neighbourhood who participated, residents from other neighbourhoods who were invited into the project, the final production's audience, etcetera).

The first half of this chapter focuses not on *Bridge of One Hair* specifically but, rather, provides a detailed introduction to Jumblies Theatre and the company's approach to social inclusion. Jumblies' assertion that "everyone is welcome"[637] led to a broad spatial imagination in *Bridge of One Hair*. Before looking at this spatial imagination it is important to understand how the company works more broadly. I situate Jumblies within the field of community art and then provide an art history of Jumblies. I begin with a note on my research methods for this case study.

A Note on my Research Methods

As I discussed in Chapter Two, my contact with *Bridge of One Hair* began through a student placement for my graduate studies at York. At the same time as I undertook the placement, I began to act as a student researcher for the VIVA! Project. VIVA! employed a Participatory Action Research model, through which artists/educators/participants in eight different popular education/community arts projects were involved in developing research questions, implementing the research and analyzing the results. Jumblies was one of the eight VIVA! partners. In reality, however, Jumblies artists were very busy running the *Bridge of One Hair* project and had little time to give much thought to the VIVA! research. I was interested in gaining hands-on experience with Jumblies and had signed up to do an independent study with the company as part of my graduate course work. When it became clear that the Jumblies

team was too stretched to focus on VIVA! I became a de facto bridge between Jumblies and VIVA!.

As time went on I became more and more enmeshed in *Bridge of One Hair*. I was both a participant and a contributing artist on the project, assisting one of the lead artists with running the weekly youth arts drop-in. I spent one year working on *Bridge of One Hair* at least weekly (often more) in my official capacity as a VIVA researcher and York student, and a second year working on the project much more intensively, producing video documentation (sometimes paid, sometimes volunteer) and as an associate artist. The research methods I used over those two years included: participant observation, interviews and extensive video documentation (along with endless editing of video- a great way to reflect on pivotal moments again and again). Participating in the project (co-leading the youth group one year, helping to train youth in video the next and, contributing to artists meetings and brainstorms throughout) was invaluable. In depth immersion in this project allowed me to experience 'creative tensions' in the artistic process first hand (both as they arose for me and as other artists and participants expressed them). I logged countless hours on the project, and came to know people working on the project well. At times I witnessed power struggles in the artistic process. I also watched as various ideas and inspirations emerged (some of which made it to the final show and some of which were abandoned along the way).

Two years after the completion of *Bridge of One Hair* I conducted reflective interviews with lead artists and project partners and asked Ruth

Howard for permission to write about the project for my own doctoral work. These interviews allowed me to follow up on the key themes I was interested in for the purposes of my own research and to test my evolving perspective on the project against the perspectives of others who knew it intimately. I also analyzed all documents pertaining to the project at that time, looking again for approaches to place and social engagement. These documents included sketches, correspondence between artists, participant feedback, lead artists' notes and ideas, draft scripts and correspondences with funders and community partners.[638]

Ongoing dialogue with Ruth Howard, who engages self-reflexively in her own critical evaluations of Jumblies' practice and the field of community arts more broadly (often publicly[639]), has also informed this research. She and I have had many conversations over the years about the challenges of focusing on place and working with 'local communities' in Canada's colonial and transnational context. Our dialogue continued right through to written exchanges regarding a draft of this chapter. And, while the post-2008 work of Jumblies Theatre is not my focus here, I have watched the company's approaches to site-specificity and social engagement evolve since that time with great interest.[640]

I want to preface the rest of this chapter with a note on the limits of my research. The personal relationships that blossomed in the making of *Bridge of One Hair* can neither be quantified nor qualitatively assessed beyond anecdotes. These relationships were surely one of the most powerful outcomes of the project, if not *the* most powerful outcome. For example, a friendship between a

pre-pubescent boy recently arrived in Canada and just learning to speak English and an elderly woman (a long-time resident of Mabelle whose predominant view of young people in the neighbourhood was that they were nuisances) unto itself seems like an important form of social connection, making a project like this worthwhile. I am not, however, focusing on those personal relationships, (of which there were so many) so much as the trajectory of the project and the moments in the artistic process that became public. I am interested in the potential of projects like this to alter social relations beyond personal friendships and to foster public dialogue about shared issues and territory, over which there is conflict. But perhaps, as I reflect in my conclusion to this chapter, the very potential of a project like this to contribute to altered social relations lies in the intimate relationships that are formed, the private or personal moments that alter social interactions in the public sphere. How to bring these moments to life in writing after the fact is a dilemma in research on socially engaged practices, and one that seems important to name.

An Introduction to Jumblies Theatre and the *Bridge of One Hair* Project
Founded by Ruth Howard in 2001, Jumblies Theatre (commonly referred to simply as 'Jumblies') is a Toronto-based community arts company. While it started as a theatre company, it has become increasingly interdisciplinary over its thirteen years, producing visual art exhibitions, publications, radio plays, musicals, tea parties and a variety of other events. Collaboratively-produced spectacular large-scale live gatherings and performances (which themselves

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incorporate visual art, music dance and participatory elements) remain at the company's core. Drawing on the tradition of the 'community play', a site-specific practice developed in the U.K. in the late 1970s which involves residents making theatre about their own lives and locales, Howard and a revolving team of artists typically work in Toronto neighbourhoods on multi-year projects which culminate in large-scale theatrical productions.[641] *Bridge of One Hair* was one of these projects. Jumblies secured funding for four consecutive years for *Bridge of One Hair* and the project was based in the south Etobicoke neighbourhoods surrounding the intersection of Dundas St. West and Islington Avenue. The apex of the project was a theatre production involving dozens of area residents, over 100 participants (some from other Toronto neighbourhoods as well) and over thirty professional artists. It was performed at the *New World Stage* Festival at the Toronto Harbourfront Centre in April 2007.

The process of creating the final *Bridge of One Hair* production entailed three years of collaboration between a team of artists hired by Jumblies and many people who lived and worked in the Dundas/Islington area. Two smaller productions were also mounted in that time (both also impressively large and highly produced by most standards). Working with seniors, youth, school kids, business owners, adult residents and local artists, the Jumblies team engaged participants in a variety of media to explore themes of home, heroes, bridges, and memory. Drawing on poetry, spoken word, drumming, fabric art, mapping, physical theatre, movement, object manipulation and video, Jumblies artists facilitated regular workshops in the area. Participants in the various workshops

were brought together as one big group to rehearse for the final production a few months before it opened. The vast majority of workshops, events and activities were based in the very small radius of a neighbourhood called Mabelle, which physically consists of a few blocks with a number of high-rise apartment buildings, a park and a school. I will further describe Mabelle shortly.

The final theatre production in 2007 drew on two key narratives, one a fairy tale of Celtic origin called Mollie Whuppie and the other the life story of feminist Somali poet and, at that time, current Mabelle resident Hawa Jibril, who, by then quite elderly, had come to Canada as a refugee in the early 1990s. At the centre of both the fairy tale and Jibril's life story are heroines who stand up to authority and overcome adversity through bravery. Mollie Whuppie is a young girl who "isn't afraid of anything"[642] and is therefore able to trick and defeat a people-eating giant with her wit and physical daring (crossing a "bridge of one hair" along the way). Jibril's story, as told in the Jumblies production, involves coming of age through rebellion against patriarchal figures (including her father; a man she is betrothed to as a girl; her husband, and; the Somali post-1969 government) and the pain of leaving her homeland due to civil war (crossing an ocean to arrive in a new land). The 2007 production for the *New World Stage* wove these narratives together, along with poetry by Duke Redbird, a distinguished poet, artist and elder of the Saugeen First Nation, who lives in Toronto. Images of the now extinct passenger pigeon, once abundant in the area, and other stories of bravery culled from the lived experiences of project participants also made up the narrative content of the production. The script was embedded in an original

musical score, making the production arguably more akin to a community opera

than a community play. The original score (by Toronto composer Alice Ping Yee

Ho) was a fusion of traditional Celtic reels, Somali recitation, Afro-Caribbean

drumming and Spoken Word. Visually the performance drew on dance, video,

shadow puppetry, clown and other pageantry arts. I will further describe the

content and references for the imagery and other elements of the play throughout

the rest of this chapter, as they reflect the project's approach to site-specificity.

Jumblies and Community Art

Jumblies very clearly situates its artistic practice within the field of

'community arts'. Jumblies has become a key player in this field, both in Toronto

and nationally.[643] Jumblies embodies many of the principles that have come to

typify community arts. The company emphasizes the reintegration of art and

'everyday life'; focuses on making local places more socially inclusive; explores

marginalized identities and stories; promotes social cohesion and/or

understanding between individuals and groups; encourages community members

without professional arts training to participate in the art-making process; draws

on vernacular cultural traditions; and (usually) exhibits or performs its work in

non-gallery settings.[644] Jumblies also employs the discursive frames of the field

(referring to 'community members' and 'social inclusion', for example), relies on

funds designated specifically for work in this genre, and frames its work vis-à-vis

that of other self-identified community artists and community arts companies.

Community art in Canada is currently in a process of shifting form a network of practices undertaken with scant or no institutional support to a discipline that is increasingly recognized by funding agencies, urban planners and universities. In Toronto, it is now funded by all three levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal). Advocacy by the Toronto Arts Council Foundation, The Neighbourhood Arts Network, York University's *Community Arts Practice* certificate program, Jumblies Theatre itself and, other community arts practitioners has generated increasing opportunities for dialogue about community art in recent years. In Toronto, critical topics of discussion in the field currently include: opportunities for youth; access to the arts for newcomer artists; equity and the problem of 'gatekeepers' (people with institutional power in the field are still disproportionately white and middle-class); access to urban spaces for art; and social engagement in city planning.[645]

As in the United States and the United Kingdom, there is also ongoing concern here in Canada about the structural relationships between funders, artists and the publics engaged through community art. Honor Ford-Smith, for example, warned over a decade ago that increased state funding and institutional recognition of community art practice brings the danger that community art will function as a brightly packaged form of social welfare.[646] Artistic Director of MABELLEarts,[647] Leah Houston points out that: "The trend to partner with "social services organizations" pushes what we are doing in a "social services" direction (helping needy people) and makes it difficult to hold on to a more organic, non-structured notion of working for social change (we are all implicated and in need

of change)."[648] This is a conversation that continues informally amongst practitioners but, for good reason, emerges less often in formalized public settings with funders. As a large budget project that was a partnership with a City of Toronto museum and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and as a project led by a white downtown artist in the racialized inner suburbs, *Bridge of One Hair* was not immune to some of the problematic structural relationships addressed in critical literature on community art. I will address some of these tensions through my analysis of how *Bridge of One Hair* took up place and social engagement.

An Art History of Jumblies

Jumblies' specific artistic lineage traces back to the British 'Community Play' movement, which began with the work of playwright Ann Jellicoe. Jellicoe developed her first community play in 1978 in partnership with the school her children attended. Through this process she created a methodology for site-specific participatory productions guided by theatre professionals and premised on local historical research and the oral histories of community members.[649] Jellicoe subsequently wrote a book about the methodology she had created (*Community Plays, How to Put them on*, 1987) and founded the Colway Theatre Trust in order to continue to explore this new form.[650] The British community play model was introduced to Canadian theatre practitioners through writer and activist Dale Hamilton who, in looking for a way to respond to encroaching development in her formerly farm-based hometown of Rockwood Ontario, began

to follow Jellicoe's work and then studied with the Colway Theatre Trust in Britain. Hamilton's *The Spirit of Shivaree* (Canada's first community play modeled on Jellicoe's approach) was performed in 1990 and was directed by The Colway Theatre Trust's Jon Oram.[651] Howard was the costume designer for the *Spirit of Shivaree.* She was inspired by its focus on "active inclusion", the idea that "everyone should be a part of it".[652] She has since said that the community play form resonated with her "personal philosophy strongly" and "gave a structure, for trying to put that into practice in an art-making, theatre-making way."[653] The Colway model insists on principles of inclusiveness, community ownership, celebration and the creative potential of all people. It also encourages a lengthy artistic process (at least 18 months), focused on arts programming for residents and high quality artistic outcomes.[654]

According to Howard, *The Spirit of Shivaree* also influenced the careers of a number of now prominent Canadian community theatre practitioners and Jumblies colleagues.[655] Common Weal (founded by Racheal Van Fossen in Regina, Saskatchewan), Runaway Moon (founded by Cathy Stubington in Enderby, BC) and Vancouver Moving Theatre (founded by Savannah Walling and Terry Hunter in Vancouver, BC), for example, were directly inspired this model. The work of groups like Welfare State International (United Kingdom, 1968-2006) and Bread and Puppet Theatre (United States, 1963- ongoing) have also clearly influenced other community-engaged theatre companies in Canada, all close associates of Jumblies. Howard (and, by extension, Jumblies) counts the founders of Shadowland Theatre (Toronto), Public Dreams Society

(Vancouver) and a number of renowned individual community theatre practitioners amongst her close friends and colleagues. It is fair to say at this point that all of these practices have cross-pollinated.

In the decade that followed *The Spirit of Shivaree*, Howard did design work for a number of community plays throughout Canada and the U.K. The first large-scale community play she produced herself was in the neighbourhood of South Riverdale in Toronto in 2000 (*Twisted Metal and Mermaid's Tears)*. Howard then founded Jumblies and went on to create *I'm Tapingi Too!* (Lawrence Heights, 2001)*, Once a Shoreline* (Davenport-Perth neighbourhood, 2004) and *Bridge of One Hair* (2007). Jumblies also worked over the years with cottagers at Camp Naivelt (a left alternative community near Brampton, Ontario) and produced *Oy Di Velt Vet Vern Yinger* at Naivelt in 2008). Jumblies followed *Bridge of One Hair* with another multi-year residency, this time in East Scarborough, producing *Like an Old Tale* in 2011. In recent years, Jumblies has increasingly focused on training and mentorship for emerging community artists, running countless workshops and presentations. The company is now in the process of creating *Train of Thought*, a "creative cross-country journey" that will connect community arts companies from across Canada and is in the midst of a multi-year residency in City Place, a newly developed neighbourhood in downtown Toronto.

"Everyone is Welcome": The Jumblies Approach to Social Engagement

Jumblies frames its approach to social engagement as one of "active inclusion."[656] As they put it: "We say everyone is welcome and grapple with the implications- aesthetic, social and practical- of trying to mean it."[657] As this statement recognizes, inclusion can mean many different things in practice. Before discussing *Bridge of One* Hair specifically, I will outline some key elements of how Jumblies approaches social engagement here. Much of the company's approach is no surprise given the philosophy of the Colway model upon which Jumblies is based, though Jumblies has also adapted its approach to suit both the dynamics of the specific Toronto neighbourhoods the company has worked in and their own artistic interests.

The first notable aspect of Jumblies' approach to social engagement is the length of time they put into developing social relationships and partnerships. Like other Colway-based companies, Jumblies runs multi-year projects. These begin with small drop-in programs and the cultivation of one-on-one relationships with community leaders and artists. The first step in the Jumblies process is typically to secure an institutional relationship, out of which the company begins to develop these one-on-one relationships.

Over the years, Jumblies has developed a large roster of long-time associate artists, who have moved with the company from project to project. With each new project, as Howard gets a feel for the area she is working in (both the cultural traditions and the aspirations of local residents) she begins to hire a larger artistic team (often, but not always, drawing on the artists she already

knows as well as from artists in the neighbourhood) and offers increasingly focused workshops, sometimes to specific demographic groups. In the case of *Bridge of One Hair*, for example, Jumblies started a sewing group at the request of women in the neighbourhood and hired a hip-hop dance instructor at the request of local youth. Jumblies develops relationships and infrastructure over time, often producing small performances or exhibitions at the end of each year of their working process in a neighbourhood. Production periods around these end-of-year shows tend to bring in more professional artists from outside of the neighbourhood than does regular programming. By the final year of a Jumblies project there are typically dozens of professional artists involved and a number of committed working groups of residents (dance troupes, sewing circles, drummers, puppeteers, etc.).

Jumblies has also learned that it is important to remain in a neighbourhood after the 'final' production. In the case of *Bridge of One Hair*, Jumblies was able to secure a year's worth of funding in which participants and the artistic team could follow up on relationships built in the excitement of the production period, stabilize emerging initiatives and, reflect on their process together. In fact, since 2004, Jumblies has found it impossible to disentangle themselves from any neighbourhood they've worked in. At the end of *Once A Shoreline* there was such a clamour for more Jumblies arts programming in the Davenport-Perth neighbourhood that Howard set up a team of Jumblies artists to stay in the area while she moved on to Etobicoke. The team that stayed became its own company, 'Arts 4 All' and still works in the area. Likewise, MABELLEarts

emerged out of *Bridge of One Hair* and 'The Community Arts Guild' was established in East Scarborough as a result of *Like An Old Tale.* Jumblies refers to these new companies as the "Jumblies offshoots" and there are reciprocal relationships between all of them, as they share funds and contribute to each other's initiatives regularly.[658]

Howard's approach to "active inclusion" not only involves working to foster relationships over a long period of time, but also entails careful consideration of who is missing from an event. Howard works from a desire to include voices that have not been heard and people who might feel left out or unwelcome. She notes the complications of trying to figure out who is excluded or doesn't feel welcome, and of attending to inclusion actively, particularly in a transnational and postcolonial city like Toronto:

> It gets more complicated than just a jolly 'oh well, let's invite everyone to be in our play'. You have to interrogate that whole idea. Not that it was ever easy….[in the British community plays]. It was a value that was continued and we hold on to it despite all the real difficulties and limitations of the place where we are… But, you know, if someone actually came forward and said 'Hey, you're neglecting us and we want to be part of it' that would be great because it would make our job easier- rather than having to figure it out.[659]

Howard remembers, for example, how she learned, when working on *Once a Shoreline,* about the complications of involvement in the artistic process for participants without legal status in Canada: "That was why people came and went and didn't talk about themselves."[660] She says that often a "light goes on" as to who is left out when speaking with people, indicating that attentive listening for exclusions in each case is part of her process.[661] When she learns that a

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group or individual is excluded she explicitly tries to reach out to them, often through an act of hospitality, which is also central to Jumblies' approach to social engagement. Howard personally fosters relationships by hosting tea parties, celebrations, and social gatherings, sometimes at her own house on Toronto Island. She visits people in their apartments, brings her children to meet them, offers to care for someone's baby while they participate in an activity. There is little sense of a boundary between Howard's personal life and the ever-evolving 'Jumblies community', which participants in each new project become a part of. These personal touches of hospitality and warmth seem central to "active inclusion" for Howard. She encourages her artistic team to take time to properly greet and welcome participants no matter how pressured they are for time.

For Jumblies the principle of active inclusion also means that anyone can contribute to a project, whether they are 'local' or not. While the Colway model brought in professional artists from elsewhere, the length to which Jumblies goes to also bring in *non-professionals* from elsewhere is striking. The company's last two large productions (*Bridge of One Hair* and *Like An Old Tale)* included sizeable groups of participants from all of the Jumblies offshoot companies, as well other groups of non-resident performers (a downtown children's choir and guest artists from Nipissing First Nation, for example). This inclusion of people from 'outside' of local boundaries is a natural extension of the 'everyone is welcome' approach. This approach to inclusion has also allowed Howard to balance parenting (she has three children) and her career. Howard's children and their friends were centrally involved in *Bridge of One Hair*, showing up regularly

after school for arts programming and rehearsals. Howard has also indicated that including people from outside of a particular neighbourhood may be a way to resist the paternalism set up by community art funding and discourse. She notes that community art rarely bridges class differences but rather: "tends to focus on low-income and marginalized people…And for good reason. But if it stays there it actually perpetuates the isolation and the marginalization…It's a balance and if it tips too much you can start marginalizing the marginalized people again."[662] Bringing middle-class participants into a low-income neighbourhood and project is indeed a tricky balance, with many implications, as I will discuss later in this chapter. Finally, Howard has artistic and practical reasons for bringing participants in from the Jumblies "offshoots" (these participants also typically also face multiple forms of marginalization). First, participants from past projects (now offshoot companies) are seasoned groups of performers and artists, who, unlike first-time participants, understand the trajectory of a large-scale production and their role within it. Drawing on their talents also allows the offshoots to contribute funds and resources to the production. I will argue shortly that the movement that Jumblies creates between marginalized neighbourhoods is in fact quite radical, given the spatial politics of Toronto.

Another crucial aspect of Jumblies' approach to social engagement is the company's emphasis on virtuosity and high artistic standards. For Howard, "The artistic product – the created thing -- is of utmost importance".[663] Unlike some community arts practitioners, Jumblies does not refer to all participants as artists but instead distinguishes between participants and artists. In each new project

the company both brings in its own artistic team and seeks to meet artists who live in the neighbourhood, making them pivotal to the project. While everyone can contribute to the project creatively, and Jumblies sees it as an obligation to find everyone a role, it is understood that some people are artistic mentors in the process and others are mentees. This said, Jumblies (like many community arts organizations) works with a broad definition of art, and recognizes virtuosity in culinary arts, gardening, tai chi and other vernacular practices.

While Claire Bishop has critiqued community art for its premise of 'authorial renunciation,'[664] Howard in fact retains tight authorial control of every Jumblies project and encourages her lead artists (directors hired for each community play, for example) to do the same. A core principle for her is:

> the conception of the artist at the centre, rather than at the side saying, "I'm facilitating everybody else here". As much as community play practitioners are constantly asking what is right for the community, and proceeding with complex ethical concerns in mind… [t]he artist's own need to grow and change in her/his art-making may well be the primary element driving adaptations of the community play form in Canada.[665]

Howard often reminds colleagues and her artistic team that they are artists, *not* social workers and that it is through making high quality art that they can have a social impact.[666] Slippage between references to Howard's approach and Jumblies' approach throughout this chapter are, in fact, precisely because of Howard's authorial control. While many people contribute ideas and their own artistic talents and interests Howard guides the process carefully and is ultimately the arbiter of any major artistic decision.

At the same time, Howard views artistic 'process' and 'product', which have sometimes been framed as 'creative tensions' in the field,[667] as inseparable. Even as she acknowledges how very difficult it can be to honour both a strong ethic of inclusion and her own artistic standards and interests, for Howard, this is where the artistry lies:

> I increasingly understand [process and product] as things that are not just held in balance, but intertwined; at their best they are indistinguishable, as in the memorable words of Paula Jardine, "the making of the event is the event." This does not imply a disregard for the notion of "quality," but rather a stretching of qualitative caring to all stages, and an extension of the notion of "good art" to include attentive and "good" art making.[668]

In a mid-process email to *Bridge of One Hair* musicians (at which point Howard was in the thick of trying to find what she saw as the right balance between process and product) she expresses her approach eloquently:

> Our mandate and passion concern mixing together unlikely and challenging social and artistic elements- professional and non-professional, rich and poor, old and young, Western and non-Western etc. Where it's most difficult and then it works is where it's most exciting. We always strive to maintain the interplay- or balance- of artistic quality and social engagement. And when it works with elegance then it can be very powerful and lovely- softening boundaries and opening possibilities."[669]

Again, the concept and practice of hospitality are central to Howard's merging of the social and the artistic. She emphasizes attention to detail and holds her artistic team to a high standard in their ability to *host* an artistic event. Great efforts are made to ensure that everyone is fed, that everyone is comfortable, that the space is welcoming and visually appealing. There is also an emphasis

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on personal greetings, on giving thanks and on recognition of individual contributions to the event.

It is also important to note that, while Howard has written that she was drawn to the community play form because it "united her interests in art, community-building and activism like never before,"[670] she is often suspicious of overtly politicized art and even veers away from overt narratives and strong points of view (let alone any form of didacticism). This is clear both in Howard's artistic choices and in how she frames her work. Jumblies' plays and events are typically an immersive collage of individual stories, impressions, vignettes and cultural practices. They are visually and aurally stunning, tightly rehearsed and at times quite loose in their narrative structure. While tied together by broader themes or narratives, unique stories and creations are juxtaposed, leaving the audience to make connections between them. This was so much the case in *Bridge of One Hair* that some audience members found it difficult to understand the narrative through-line of the play, even as they were deeply moved by the experience of witnessing it. This links back to Howard's emphasis on inclusion. It is very important to her that everyone is invited in to the artistic process, no matter how divergent their perspectives or experiences are from her own or those of other participants. In fact, it is precisely the potential to 'bridge' conflicting perspectives or different worldviews that compelled Howard to take up the Colway model. She talks about how, even while *The Spirit of Shivaree* was an "issue-play" (something Howard herself has never been drawn to), director Jon Oram began by inviting people on the other side of the issue (residents of

the 'monster homes' that were taking over the farmland that the play sought to protect) into the process. This is, to Howard's mind, an example of "the spirit of active inclusion."[671]

Finally, Jumblies' approach to social engagement continues to be shaped by the dynamics of place at all scales, that of each neighbourhood the company works in, the City of Toronto and Canada as a nation. The company tailors its approach to social engagement contextually, while driven by the principles I have just outlined. As I discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation, Toronto's neighbourhoods are incredibly diverse culturally and are sites of multiple displacements. They sit on First Nations land, even as within them traces of original First Nations cultures are few and far between. Many of these neighbourhoods are marked by poverty, polarization, social alienation and crumbling social infrastructure. What is most interesting to me about Jumblies as it relates to site-specificity, is how the company has functioned within these contexts, how its process has adapted to these conditions. It is striking that Jumblies has worked in neighbourhoods where there is not even an illusion of a coherent community at the beginning of the process (unlike some places, where there may be a strong sense of a community, even as it is premised on named or unnamed exclusions). This was certainly the case in *Bridge of One Hair.* I turn now to the politics of place in South Etobicoke and Howard's response to them in the *Bridge of One Hair* project.

The Politics of Place in South Etobicoke

Jumblies was initially invited to work in south Etobicoke by Mike Lipowski, the curator of Montgomery's Inn. Montgomery's Inn is a City of Toronto heritage museum that has traditionally focused on Anglo settler history in the area, providing tours that reference a day in the life of 19th Century Irish pioneers. The Inn was built in approximately 1830 for Irish immigrants Thomas and Margaret Montgomery and operated under their care until the mid 1850s. From that time until the 1940s the land around the Inn continued to be farmed by members of the Montgomery family and their tenants. In 2000 it was bought by the City of Toronto, becoming one of the city's ten community museums. The Inn has been restored to look as it did in 1847, which the museum refers to as its "heyday,"[672] and most programs running at the Inn also reference this time period. The Inn is promoted as a "meeting place" and "center for community conversation."[673]

Discouraged by how few people living in close proximity to the Inn frequented or visited the site, and having seen *Twisted Metal and Mermaid's Tears* in south Riverdale, Lipowski invited Howard to work on a project that would build an affective bridge between local residents and the Inn. In an early appeal for project funding, Lipowski wrote:

> In every part of Etobicoke… it is clear there are communities that we do not reach. The Inn tells the story of one man and his family, and we are trying to change that. What brings all these cultures together? They share stories of journey, immigration and settlement as connective bridges to the present. We aim to introduce our current population of new Canadians to the stories of people who had similar experiences over 160 years ago.[674]

The local Business Improvement Association (B.I.A.) supported the project as well from the beginning, framing their support in related but slightly different terms, writing: "Islington has a troubling demographic with age, income and ethnic divides that are obvious and problematic. In our opinion this type of initiative is needed in the village."[675]

The "problematic" divides referred to by the B.I.A. are clear upon even a cursory visit to the area. The area surrounding Dundas/Islington is marked by vast disparities in wealth in a small geographical radius. These disparities are both spatialized and racialized. Just north of Dundas St. West are large single-family homes occupied primarily by white homeowners of Anglo-European descent. Immediately south of Dundas and west of Islington Avenue is a cluster of low-income high-rise apartment buildings, many of which are operated by Toronto Community Housing (TCH). The majority of tenants in these buildings are first generation immigrants or refugees to Canada. They are primarily of Eastern European, Korean, Caribbean and Somali backgrounds. The few-block radius in which these high-rise buildings are situated is commonly referred to as "Mabelle," referencing Mabelle Avenue, which runs through the heart of the TCH building cluster. Dundas St. West itself and the area to the north and east of it are referred to as the "Village of Islington," a name that has been reinforced by B.I.A branding initiatives. The whole area encompassing Mabelle and the "Village" was once known as Mimico, a Mississauga name roughly translated as "resting place of the wild pigeon."[676]

The spatial divisions between Mabelle and the Village of Islington have been maintained through both practice and discourse. Foot travel between Mabelle and the Village of Islington was limited prior to this project. Those living in the "village" perceived Mabelle as dangerous and residents from Mabelle have tended to do little shopping or socializing on the strip of Dundas West just north of Mabelle, which is clearly delineated as part of the "village." Throughout the *Bridge of One Hair* project I heard Mabelle residents speak many times about the lack of businesses catering to their needs in the area. When Jumblies Theatre first began working in the area, artists who were unfamiliar with the area were warned to be careful walking through Mabelle and it was suggested that it was a center for criminal activity. Residents of Mabelle themselves and people who live in the surrounding area have at times referred to Mabelle as a "ghetto." While some residents have also described it as a friendly community and a nice place to live, it has commonly been described as dangerous, grey and alienated. This is how it was described to Howard at the onset of the project.

In contrast to the way Mabelle is commonly characterized, the "Village of Islington" has been discursively framed as a historic area. The use of the term "village" itself suggests an image of intimate 'old world' relations and the Village of Islington B.I.A has emphasized local history through their logo, the aesthetics of the area's street signs and uniform storefronts, and an emphasis on the presence of Montgomery's Inn itself. The B.I.A. logo (which has been enlarged as a street-level mural) foregrounds a silhouette of low-rise older buildings against a cityscape of high-rises and reads "Historic Village of Islington". The

plaque which accompanies the mural version of the logo explains that "[t]he shadowy high-rise buildings represent the present. The road leading to the village is peopled by figures from the past."[677]

The most prominent branding of the area as an historic site has been a mural project developed through a partnership between the Heritage Etobicoke Foundation, the B.I.A, and Toronto Economic Development. *The Islington Mosaic* was initiated as a "revitalization strategy" to "create a visual legacy for Islington by commemorating our shared community history- its defining moments, rhythm of life, changing workforce, how we looked and what we did for fun through the years."[678] Referencing only the white settler past of the area, the first of these murals was painted on Dundas West in 2006, with more following from that time until 2010. Exemplary of the message projected by this project is a mural called "The Way we Were, Islington ca 1900" which depicts a bucolic village scene in which a horse and carriage approach a white settler family, clearly of the middle-class. A church is prominent in the background. Artist John Kuna, who painted the majority of the murals, clearly painted them in a style meant to evoke nostalgia.[679] The plaque accompanying one mural titled *Briarly- Gone but not Forgotten* (John Kuna, 2007) explains that the piece "was designed not only to illustrate a part of Islington's history but also to convey a sense of comfort, peace, home and family. Rather than becoming a theme of mourning and end, it is instead conceived as an image of endurance and renewal."[680]

Montgomery's Inn itself has also been both crucial to and implicated in the cultivation of the 'Historic Village of Islington.' Despite the fact that by the time

Thomas Montgomery arrived in Mimico the area was already an active industrial

hub, the Inn has functioned as an emblem of a pioneer past, representing

Montgomery as an original settler in the area, upon whose legacy the present

Village has been built.[681] According to Lipowski, prior to his tenure as curator, the

Inn did little to explore the multiple waves of immigration to the area or the story

of the tragic famine that forced Montgomery and so many Irish settlers (primarily

Catholic) to make their way to Canada. Neither did the Inn acknowledge the

diverse range of people who interacted within its walls during the years that it

was operating. While archival documents suggest that the Inn was a rough and

tumble, hard-drinking place in which people mixed across class, gender and

race, and in which the famine in Ireland was very much an ongoing social

concern, the Inn has traditionally presented a genteel history, void of bawdy

behaviour or social upheaval.[682] Lipowski recalls a stormy response to his

suggestion to set up a beer tent outside the Inn for a fall festival in the early

2000s:

> The volunteers were up in arms. A lot of volunteers were very very upset that we would be serving alcohol. It seemed a little ironic. Montgomery's Inn! It's a tavern. But no, you should be drinking tea….It's like they were a bunch of tea drinkers here, like that's what they were doing in the tavern.[683]

A number of years ago, the Village of Islington B.I.A. encouraged Lipowski to

nominate Thomas Montgomery for an event about local heroes. Lipowski

refused, citing evidence that Montgomery was "not a nice man. He burned the

Inn across the road down…he was a ruthless businessman."[684] Instead, he

nominated Hawa Jibril, Mabelle resident and the heroine of *Bridge of One Hair*. According to Lipowski, the B.I.A. was appalled by his suggestion. Given the traditional role of the Inn as a museum and the B.I.A.'s refusal to engage with Mabelle beyond reference to it as a form of urban blight, Lipowski's nomination of Jibril and, more significantly to this paper, Lipowski's invitation to Howard to work with stories from Mabelle, were considerable challenges to the status quo.

The branding of the Village of Islington by the B.I.A. and the Etobicoke Historical Society is a clear example of an appeal to place as "authentic", bounded, rooted and stable. Implicit in this discourse is the safe refuge of the local against the encroachment of the urban and global. Yearnings for "the way [things] were", especially in light of the racialized divisions between the Village and Mabelle are reminiscent of geographer Jane M. Jacobs' warning that "[i]mperial nostalgias work through place on a multiple register. They are present in schemes to preserve what was and also in visions of what might be."[685]

Subverting the Politics of Place Through *Bridge of One Hair*

I turn now to how Jumblies entered into the politics of place that were operating in the Dundas/Islington area. I propose that there are four key ways in which Jumblies subverted the politics of place into which it entered, embodying instead crucial elements of the progressive senses of place put forward by Massey and Kwon. These subversions were throughout the life of the project, from initial contact with the site, to the kinds of research and art making that were undertaken, through to the aesthetics of the final show and the narratives that formed its poetic backbone.

I have already outlined Massey's progressive conceptualization of place in detail in Chapter Four, so will just very briefly review it here. Massey argues that we too commonly draw artificial boundaries around places, framing their identities (both past and present) as fixed. Massey is interested, instead, in challenging "attempts to fix the meaning of places, to enclose and defend them."[686] Rejecting a false binary between space and place, which poses space as universal and empty and place as contained and peopled, Massey insists that we ought to think of space as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far."[687] Places, she argues, are:

> collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Their character will be a product of these intersections within that wider setting, and of what is made of them. And, too, of the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place.[688]

Place, then, is not made internally but in relation to its outside, through multidirectional flows of people, products, and culture. It is made both by meetings and by non-meetings, by social relations that have existed and by social relations that have not. In *For Space* Massey outlines three key propositions for a new way of thinking about space. Space is, she says: "a product of interrelations…constituted through interactions." It is also "the sphere… of coexisting *heterogeneity*" and is "always in the process of being made… never finished; never closed."[689]

In Chapter Four I also proposed some ways in which Massey's work on place might inform socially engaged site-specific work. I suggested that a

progressive sense of place might lead artists to ask not "what is this place?" but questions like: What are the (contested) dynamics of this place right now? What specific constellation has been formed here out of global flows? How might changes to any aspect of that constellation shift the dynamics of this place? Where do the boundaries of a site end? How are they imagined? I also suggested that Massey's scholarship lends itself to critical analysis of site-specific work and can lead to questions like: Which aspects of a site's heterogeneity are left out of the focus? What relationships are made between 'local' dynamics and dynamics elsewhere? How does the artistic project recognize or challenge the 'power-geometry of time-space compression'? I turn now to an analysis of *Bridge of One Hair* in light of the questions posed by Massey's scholarship on place.

Uprooting the Inn

In her attempt to "uproot 'space' from that constellation of concepts in which it has unquestioningly so often been embedded (stasis; closure; representation),"[690] Massey focuses on the ways in which places were never actually autonomous and were always sites of internal difference. She writes: "On this reading the spatial, crucially, is the realm of the configuration of potentially dissonant (or concordant) narratives…Places, rather than being locations of coherence, become the foci of the meeting and the nonmeeting of the previously unrelated."[691] I turn now to how Howard and Jumblies 'uprooted' Montgomery's Inn as the symbolic centre of the *Bridge of One Hair* project,

focusing instead on the internal heterogeneity of Mabelle. The invitation from

Montgomery's Inn was to build a relationship between traditional users of the Inn

and people in Mabelle (or, as one member of the Inn's board put it, "to break the

glass wall that runs along Islington").[692] Howard focused instead on what her

early script notes refer to as "uprooting the inn."

Immediately upon accepting Lipowski's invitation, Howard began building

relationships with Mabelle residents. In an early meeting at the Inn Howard made

connections with Somali community leaders, including Jibril's daughter (Faduma

Ahmed-Alim) and other respected Somali women in the neighbourhood, ensuring

that (at least some) residents of Mabelle would welcome such a project. And

once she began the project officially, Howard focused predominantly on the

multiple stories running through the Toronto Community Housing (TCH) buildings

and the specificities of those stories. It quickly became clear to Howard that,

while people living in Mabelle may currently be living in shared circumstances,

their class backgrounds range dramatically, as do their cultural backgrounds,

religions and ideologies. Tensions were particularly clear between Somali

Canadian residents and Caribbean Canadian residents, seemingly based on

different class origins and religious differences. There were also tensions

between youth in the area and adults who were either concerned by a lack of

youth programming or who feared that such programming would further 'corrupt'

neighbourhood youth (by mixing boys and girls or promoting 'permissive' views,

for example). The project had to run multiple kinds of workshops, in multiple

locations and focusing on different artistic forms to engage residents of different ages and cultural backgrounds.

Rather than conceiving of *Bridge of One Hair* as a bridge between the "village" and the "ghetto", thereby accepting the two as internally coherent entities in need of a relationship, Howard's efforts seemed from the onset to be as much about bridges between TCH residents. Howard negotiated a relationship with the TCH and the TCH became a partner in the project, supplying an office on the ground floor of one of its buildings, which became Jumblies' central office. This very act began the project by uprooting the Inn as the symbolic center of the area, making the TCH buildings, which had been framed as the periphery, the heart of the project. The TCH buildings remained the center of operations for the project throughout its life and *MABELLEArts*, an offshoot arts company that grew out of the *Bridge of One Hair* project still operates out of the original Jumblies office there.

Critiques of the concept of place as internally coherent are closely related to critiques of the concept of community, and both draw on scholarship that emphasizes internal difference and fluid subjectivity.[693] Jumblies also focused on the heterogeneous identities of its participants and facilitating artists, involving everyone affiliated with the project in examining their multiple senses of place and self through a writing exercise called "Where I'm From."[694] The "Where I'm From" exercise leads participants to write about their memories of past homes and to connect these memories to specific details of the places they currently inhabit. Through a series of prompts ("Write three things that you have left

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behind", "Write three places where you might hide something special to you") participants generate lists of words and names, which are then drawn on to construct a poem. The resulting poetry richly reveals the complexities of our individual senses of place, which are shaped both by memory of places past and by everyday practices. "I am from pizza and corn, Jamaica, Guyana and the Cineplex", reads one poem.[695] "I am from the Serbian Flag. I am from 24 Mabelle and the basketball courts at school", reads another.[696] These individual poems were then taken apart in a group exercise and remade into collective poems, revealing the incredible heterogeneity of the area, in all its specificity.

Jumblies also 'uprooted' the Inn aesthetically. While the Inn has traditionally focused on cultural practices like tea services, period dress and Celtic music, Jumblies artists drew on the cultural practices of Mabelle residents, merging them with their own artistic practices to create new forms. Choreographer Penny Couchie, for example, upon learning about the pivotal role of basketball in the lives of neighbourhood children and youth (basketball courts are one of the only public spaces in the area), led workshops in basketball rhythms; a kind of dance and drumming through dribbling basketballs. Tea services were re-shaped as Somali participants and artists taught Howard and other artists about their spiced tea-brewing practices. While working with a group of seniors in Mabelle, choreographer Penny Couchie developed a form of "hand dancing," which allowed people with limited mobility to express images of home, heroes and other themes using only their hands and arms. The final musical

score for the production, as I have already mentioned, fused traditional Celtic reels, Somali recitation, Afro-Caribbean drumming and Spoken Word.

Jumblies' focus on internal heterogeneity in Mabelle was a natural result of the company's insistence on active inclusion. While a focus on inclusion can be read as naïve, as an additive approach to difference,[697] in Howard's work the "underlying compulsion to include everyone" seems to stem from the recognition that communities and places are inevitable sites of *exclusion* and omissions. One of Jumblies mandates in *Bridge of One Hair* was to seek "out individuals and groups who would not initially step forward"[698] and part of Jumblies' approach to building relationships in the early years of the project was to hold meetings in which those who attended were asked to consider who was missing from the conversation.[699]

In a more recent Jumblies project, Howard started by working with (transient) residents of a strip of motels that serve as the overflow for Toronto's shelter system for families. These motels have typically been framed as a form of urban blight, certainly not as the "heart" of a community.[700] Howard started with the motels because she knew the people in them were excluded from conversation. Even as she took this unusual step to include the families living in the motels, she points to even further exclusions that likely existed in the project: "By definition if you're really leaving someone out you don't know." "What's so beyond my horizon I can't imagine it?" she asks.[701] I remember one Jumblies meeting in which Howard asked whether place-based projects didn't also bear

the responsibility of including the stories of people who died in the process of trying to immigrate to the place at hand.

It is also interesting to note that, while Howard is obviously at the centre of her own projects as artistic director, even in these projects she describes her own feeling of being "out of place". This, she says, is a reoccurring "feeling that one gets [in any place] and for good reason."[702] Howard encourages the Jumblies artistic team to continue with their work in a new neighbourhood despite feeling out-of-place, placing their faith in the artmaking process.[703] On one hand, in light of Howard's profound sense that everyone is out-of-place and the reality that Toronto's neighbourhoods are not even remotely sites of shared history or identity, this makes sense. As I will return to later in this chapter, however, this feeling is also important to attend to given the dynamics of race and class in Toronto. Does this mean that at times Jumblies is encouraging its artists to ignore important reflections on their own positionality, both within Toronto and within the project?

A Place of Routes

A second way in which Jumblies challenged the politics of place in the Dundas/Islington area was by focusing on routes rather than roots. Proponents of a relational geographical imagination reject the conceptualization of place as either bounded or internally coherent, emphasizing instead flows and routes between places. Massey conceives of place as a meeting place of specific trajectories and routes, and argues that we should understand places as

simultaneously constituted by elsewhere and constitutive of elsewhere. The "identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history", she writes, "[i]t derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with "the outside."[704] While this "outward looking"[705] approach may seem quite obvious theoretically, Massey reminds us that it is usually ignored in practice. *Bridge of One Hair* did, however, take up this understanding of place as a "constellation of trajectories"[706] in practice.

The first way in which the project adopted an outward-looking approach to place was through innovative forms of mapping. It is interesting to compare two different mapping exercises that were developed early in the project to collect stories and impressions related to the area. The first was an enlarged map of the area, upon which anyone could pin a site-specific memory of an experience they had had or a historical moment they knew of. Taking this map out in public to collect stories (something I did on a few occasions early in the project) was a frustrating but educative exercise. Attempting to gather site-specific memories from within the bounds of the map was difficult. Residents seemed to have few memories to offer and those that were collected were for the most part prosaic ("This is a great trail for biking and running" or "I go to school here").[707] In conversation during the mapping exercise, however, residents would recount detailed memories of elsewhere, their childhood homes, places they'd lived internationally or elsewhere in Toronto. There was no room on the map for these stories and, at one particular point of frustration, we discussed bringing a world map along for the memory-gathering. The second mapping exercise that was

taken up by Jumblies (a more complex exercise than pointing to spots on a world map) produced much more interesting results than the collective memory map had. Like the 'Where I'm From' poems, this mapping process focused on individual "mind" maps made in a group setting based on a series of instructions delivered by a facilitating artist. This was a mapping exercise that emphasized *routes* rather than *roots*. Through a series of prompts participants drew visual representations of places that felt like home, wishes for the Dundas/Islington neighbourhood, places of importance in their lives, feelings about their current homes and trajectories between all of these. Again, like the 'Where I'm From' poems, these maps illustrated the specificities of place and the multiple memories which collide in any one place.

An outward-looking approach to place can also be seen in Howard's choice of narrative content for the project's final show. As I've already discussed, the life story of Somali poet Hawa Jibril, as told through her poetry, became central to *Bridge of One Hair*. This choice of Hawa Jibril's lifestory as a central throughline for the show became evident to community members midway through the project, in June 2006 when a smaller-scale work in progress performance, *Tea and Bridges*, was presented in Mabelle. As was the final show, the performance was scripted by Ruth Howard and set to a musical score. The score fused recitation of Jibril's poems (performed by acclaimed Somali musician Faduma Nkruma) with the Mollie Whuppie story (a fairy tale about heroism). It traced Jibril's nomadic childhood in the desert, her involvement in shaping the Somali independence movement and her disillusionment with the

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post-independence government. Finally, it depicted her arrival in Toronto as a refugee, and described the pain of witnessing civil war in her home country from afar. The now extinct passenger pigeons of Mimico were represented visually through movement in the performance. The show was opened by drumming from a troupe of Mabelle youth.

This mid-process performance was met with criticism from all sides. The youth troupe and some of the artists who had worked with them (I was among them) felt sidelined and a number of the youth stated that they had "wanted to do a show about Mabelle."[708] Representatives of the Inn would have preferred, they said, to "see stories that will help to change perceptions of the Inn."[709] Members of the Arts Ambassadors, a group of area residents brought together to help Jumblies bridge social differences in the area, recommended "integrating more historical geographical material."[710] Even members of the Somali community, who were very moved by the performance, weeping and celebrating after seeing it, were surprised by the focus on Jibril's story. As one Somali audience member put it: "I was amazed. She was singing about my people, coming to Canada, how hard that is, our flag being neglected and imagining it flying again, wanting to go back and not being able to."[711]

On one hand the negative response to the mid-process show on the part of the primarily racialized and entirely local youth troupe raises questions about the effects of a "politics of place *beyond* place", when it can potentially remarginalize the stories and artistic forms of groups who already experience marginalization. The children performing the Mollie Whuppie story in *Tea and*

Bridges were mostly middle-class (primarily white) kids from downtown Toronto. There were also some local children, but they made up less of the group than the downtown children did. One of the justifications for giving these children (who were younger than the youth troupe) larger roles in the show, was that they had more reliably shown up for rehearsals and been more focused (i.e. less unruly).[712] Indeed, the youth troupe always functioned more as a drop-in than a focused rehearsal space and workshops (even for African drumming, which the youth had requested) were rambunctious, unruly and sometimes taken up more with personal dramas than with any focused learning. To anyone who has worked with a group of youth this is hardly surprising. But perhaps in this instance an expression of 'rooted' place-identity, even as it might exclude others or remain bounded, would have been an important reclamation or moment of self-identification. The youth had a rare opportunity to present their perspectives on Mabelle but were, in the end, disappointed by the process and felt re-marginalized by their role as an opening act for the 'main event'. Even as they argue for the necessity of coalition politics and difficult work across differences, many feminist theorists insist on the importance of the caucus, a homeplace in which to reenergize (even as internal heterogeneities are worked out within that homeplace).[713] The 2006 youth troupe might have served as just that, a chance to energize through shared impressions of Mabelle as a home, both good and bad. Instead, because the show did not focus on their experiences of Mabelle as a place or their talents and voices, the youth felt alienated from the project. Very few of them returned after a summer break in the project to continue working

toward the final show. In the balancing act of becoming an inclusive space for everyone, this moment was one in which Jumblies fell off the 'bridge of one hair'. Artist meetings debriefing the 2006 performance were fraught.[714]

The surprised reaction to the 2006 show from all residents, however, also points to the rarity of an approach to place that focuses on routes rather than roots. What I mean to emphasize here is not the focus on Hawa Jibril's story per se, but the fact that so much of the story was based in Somalia rather than in Toronto where Jibril had now landed. Here was a performance derived from a place in Toronto that chose to focus on events in Mogadishu and the Somali desert. Through highlighting Jibril's memories of her homeland, Howard again broke out of the tropes of the "village" and the "ghetto", reframing the apartment towers of Mabelle as sites infused with struggle, hope, sorrow, and a profound longing for elsewhere. Montgomery's Inn has traditionally presented itself as a site of refuge, emphasizing how Montgomery welcomed travelers from afar. This focus on the Inn as a site of refuge, however, deemphasizes conflict, violence, oppression, or nostalgia for elsewhere *here in the place of arrival*. An exploration of Jibril's rich life in Somalia allowed the project to explore these elements of how the Dundas/Islington area is experienced as a place. Interestingly, the way Howard explained her choice to focus on Jibril's life in the project, again leads back to her sense of "active inclusion": "We chose the Somali story because they're the people most recently here under the most difficult circumstances. They're one of the groups most left out and in need of connection."[715] In hindsight, bringing the youth into the Somali story or focusing on their own

'routes' rather than 'roots' (which, in fact, youth troupe leader Loree Lawrence had done in 2005, for the project's first end-of-year show, *Where I'm From*) could possibly have been achieved had the right supports been in place to do so. As one of the assistant leaders of the youth group that year, I feel partially responsible for this missed opportunity.

Finally, it is worth noting that the project created literal routes in and out of Mabelle, in embodied practice, breaking down the strict boundaries of the separate neighbourhoods. Before *Bridge of One Hair*, non-Mabelle residents rarely walked through Mabelle because it was perceived as dangerous. So, too, was travel to Montgomery's Inn rare for Mabelle residents. By holding rehearsals in the basement of one of the TCH buildings in the heart of Mabelle, Jumblies made travel into Mabelle much more regular. Early in the project, someone had warned Jumblies artists not to travel a long underground corridor between the elevator and the basement workshop/rehearsal space TCH had allotted to Jumblies in one of their buildings. This played on pre-existing fears of violence on the part of artists who did not yet know the neighbourhood well and Jumblies instituted a policy that no one should travel the corridor alone. Mid-way into the process, by which point artists had traversed the corridor countless times, carrying all manner of props, supplies and food, this fear had abated and the rule was often disregarded. Similarly, while no doubt there was trepidation on the part of 'Village of Islington' residents the first few times they traveled to the rehearsal space, it is doubtful that their fear continued as the rehearsal schedule ramped up. I suspect that, as it did for Jumblies artists from outside of the

neighbourhood, the frequency of their travel on this route and their increased familiarity with Mabelle (both its residents and as a space) significantly altered their preconceptions of the neighbourhood and consequent senses of safety. Fear of Montgomery's Inn on the part of some Mabelle children and youth (they thought it was haunted) was also challenged by regular visits to the Inn in the first year of the project.

Jumblies also created a route out of Mabelle through its choice to perform at the Harbourfront Centre. This was a first for Jumblies- other shows had been performed where they were rehearsed, thereby easily drawing a local audience. Choosing to do the show at Harbourfont was both a major logistical challenge (for every show, Jumblies staff had to make sure that all the performers were on a rented school bus before making the long drive downtown- no small feat) and a statement of sorts. This was not just good enough art to be shown in a 'community' setting but deserved to be on the world stage (literally, the title of the festival) at one of Toronto's premiere venues. When participants boarded the bus for the first time very few of them had ever been to Harbourfront at all. In fact most of the young people had never heard of it. Fear and intrigue about Toronto's downtown were eased by an intensive run of final rehearsals and the performances, during which Harbourfront became a second home for the cast. Jumblies also hired a bus to take audiences from Etobicoke to Harbourfront and back again for every show.

Routes not only increased between the 'Village' and Mabelle, and Etobicoke and downtown, but also between Mabelle and other Toronto

neighbourhoods. As I have discussed, not only do many of Jumblies 'outside' artists travel from site to site, so too do participants from Jumblies' past theatre projects. While each of Jumblies' residencies in different Toronto neighbourhoods draw on the people, dynamics and memories in place as a starting point, the company does not focus exclusively on working with people or stories that are 'of that place'. Residents from the Davenport Perth neighbourhood, where Jumblies had been working in the years previous to this project contributed their own memories to *Bridge of One Hair* and became core cast members. The *VIVA children's choir*, with which Howard has an ongoing professional relationship, became the chorus for the final show. Jumblies puts significant resources and time into ensuring that anyone who wants to participate but lives outside the bounds of the area of a given project has the requisite transportation and is welcomed into the work. This practice creates new routes in the city, routes between areas that are commonly ghettoized and that are certainly not part of the city's circuit of cultural hotspots. It also rejects the idea of a bounded community or place altogether, creating new communities of shared practice, an element of the work I turn to now.

Place as Process

As I have already discussed, Massey understands space and place as always under construction. Massey writes: "Conceptualising space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too for the possibility of politics."[716]

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Here again is Massey's insistence on space as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far"[717] or a "meeting up of histories."[718]

This way of thinking about place is very much in tune with Jumblies' approach. Jumblies views "the ultimate product" of the artistic processes it leads as "the experience, the change wrought, and the memory - the transient micro-utopia and its after-effects."[719] This approach suggests a productive rather than a descriptive approach to place. It suggests that place is significantly re-made in the very process of the art-making itself. As an elderly Village of Islington resident turned actor put it in a post-project debrief and evaluation: "I really enjoyed being part of it. I enjoyed the show. I especially enjoyed all the people. I don't need photos. It's in my memory."[720] Social memory in place and place-identity, then, are always evolving, even as a project exploring a place is undertaken.

While Jumblies shows explore the dynamics of place they encounter upon entering a neighbourhood, the company's approach also recognizes the ways in which the dynamics are altered and shaped by their very presence as a company. Howard says that one long term objective the work is: "To model a definition of community that is based on a flexible and inclusive process: on people *doing* something together towards a common goal."[721] This contrasts significantly with the relationship between memory and place put forward by the B.I.A. murals, in which memory making is understood as a premised on individual reception of images from moments fixed in the past. Because the process of putting on a theatre production is so intensive for the final months, requiring

countless hours of time together in a shared physical space (in this case on the part of close to 100 people) a temporary community is formed. As one Jumblies artist put it in a post-show debrief: "You don't eat, you don't sleep, it's a great feeling to be in that space with a lot of other people who are sharing it. …it's very bitter sweet because you know it's going to end. It's a little encapsulation of all that's joyful in life."[722] The fact that the Jumblies artistic process is so lengthy (continuing on well past the 'final performance', and then merging into the work of its 'offshoot' companies) allows the relationships created during that intensive time to continue through new shared processes.

Place as Relational: Displacement Here and There

Finally, *Bridge of One Hair* embodied Massey's and Kwon's theories of place insofar as it established *relationships* between place and displacement, between here and elsewhere and, between social alienation and fear of the 'Other.' As I've discussed, Kwon argues for a relational approach to place in site-specific art but doesn't elaborate on what this might look like. Massey, on the other hand has tried to elaborate on the practice of a relational approach by looking at fair trade campaigns that emphasize the direct relationship between consumerism 'here' and labour practices 'elsewhere.'[723] This is a chance to think about a relational approach to place in a socially engaged art practice, addressing Kwon's concerns.

Interestingly, traces of a relational approach to place in the *Bridge of One Hair* final show focused on *displacement.* While the relationship between displacement elsewhere and displacement in Etobicoke was not spelled out for

the audience in the final production, a connection between these displacements was referenced poetically through the lines of a First Nations orator, who appeared throughout the play to deliver fragments of Duke Redbird's poem "Old Woman."[724] In the show "Old Woman" cleverly doubled as a reference for Jibril herself, but on its own the poem can be read as a lament for a colonized land. "Where are they now?", the poem asks, "After they cut down your beloved forest/ And slaughtered your animal brothers/ And tore wings from your bright birds/ And ground your mountains into dust." In the context of the show "Old Woman" could be simultaneously understood as a lament for Jibril's displacement from her country and as grieving the displacement of the Mississauga people from Mimico. Performer Sid Bobb, who recited Redbird's poetry in the production, writes in the show's program:

> From my perspective, the Bridge of One Hair has not yet been crossed between most First Nations and Canada. The gulf is historical and ever present….I am inspired that Jumblies actively sought to include the voice of local First Nations; voices that bring out of the shadows the necessary elements to help imagine the bridge.[725]

Howard writes in the program notes that *Old Woman* "provided a poetic bridge between the people who had fled here from their land, and this land bereft of its own people."[726] She had insisted from the onset of the project that First Nations voices about the area had to be included and, because there was no longer a prominent First Nations presence in the area, had hired researcher and actor Sid Bobb, himself of Coast Salish descent, to research the Aboriginal history of the area and present it to the artistic team.

The recitation that opened and closed the play also reflected a relational approach between here and elsewhere, making a connection between Jibril's treatment upon her arrival in Toronto and her longing for Somalia. The recitation was from one of Jibril's poems, titled *Refugees in Canada,* which begins with these lines:

> Indeed Canada welcomes refugees
> Does not let them starve, but provides for them.
> Yet we are always unsatisfied and broke.
> For the little we get hardly suffices for food and shelter.
> There are strange people coming from everywhere.
> They never notice you nor greet you.
> They all keep to themselves.
> Hastily locking their doors.
> I feel isolated and sick with loneliness.
> I am trapped, for I am not yet "landed".[727]

The play ends with a chilling line from Jibril's poetry: "I dreamed there was hope for my country." To return to Kwon's theory of the "wrong place", opening and closing the show with these lines positions Jibril as a hero in the "wrong place" rather than a newcomer to the "right place." These lines could also be interpreted as a dream of hope for what is currently a 'wrong place' in Canada, a place that does not open itself to newcomers.

In post-project reflections, Howard wished that she had taken the relationship between displacements even further. This relationship was most interesting to her both artistically and ethically.[728] Howard was moved by the poetic relationship between Redbird and Jibril's poetry, the "generosity of spirit in the face of bleakness, on the part of both poets and both poems, from a kind of elder point of view. A kind of possibility of regeneration and reconciliation or

healing or some kind of reflection, maybe...”[729] She also saw emphasis on the relationship between “the absent First Nations voice and ravaged land and newcomers coming from other ravaged places” as a social and ethical obligation, particularly in light of the fact that she was working with a museum. Howard adds, however, that she was “a bit nervous” to take this connection further in light of the pressure from community members demanding more “local history.”[730]

Howard did find a way to write her own positionality into *Bridge of One Hair*, establishing a relationship between fear of the ‘Other’ on the part of established Canadians and the social alienation Jibril and other newcomers have felt upon their arrival in Toronto. In both *Tea and Bridges* (the work-in-progress show in 2006) and *Bridge of One Hair* (2007), a pair of characters called Nettie and Nellie were central to the script. Nettie and Nellie were the device that held Hawa Jibril’s life story and the Mollie Whuppie fairy tale together. Howard conceived of Nettie and Nellie as Mollie Whuppie’s sisters, who have been safely deposed in a palace after Mollie’s heroic defeat of a fearsome giant. Nettie and Nellie are fearful characters, who are proprietorial of the palace. For Howard, Nettie and Nellie represented the white settler guardians of colonial life and the traditional western museum. Obsessive collectors of teapots, they are stuck in their ways, determined to “keep the palace tidy”[731] and maintain order. This is until they begin to search for Mollie, who has gone missing, by offering a reward for “the bravest girl in the world.”[732] They are flooded by a mass of newcomers, each with their own tales to tell, one of which is Jibril’s life story. Nettie and Nellie become a captive audience to Jibril’s story, allowing the events of her life to

unfold as they sit on the sidelines. They interject here and there and, moved by the story, reappear at the end of the play to welcome Jibril to her new home, a signal of their own newfound bravery to open the gates to the palace (read the museum, the neighbourhood, the city or even the nation). "She might need help", their assistants cry, and then: "Yes look, she's in a tower." "I am going to bid her welcome" Nettie announces. "Let in the stranger" the chorus sings. In an interview, Howard explained the importance of Nettie and Nellie to me:

> [they] learn something. As we all learn. And I wanted that… the possibility of learning. Of hearing a story and realizing there's something you didn't know and that changes your behaviour with people and I wanted to keep that in a storytelling realm. You know it could have been other people, could have been me, it's to present that idea of change without pointing fingers at anyone in particular…[733]

This possibility of learning something is potentially an example of the 'dilemmatic space' Honig proposes (outlined in Chapter Four of this dissertation). Nettie and Nellie's identities are shaken as they open themselves to other stories and realize the limits of their own knowledge. This said, the Nettie and Nellie characters were, in my opinion, a questionable device through which to establish a relationship between settler proprietary behaviour and othering of newcomers. First, without Howard's explanation of what they represented (offered to the artistic team but not written in the program for the play or explicitly explained to participants) it is doubtful that many people (participants or audience members) would have understood their significance as symbols of representatives of the Inn or as symbols of Howard's own vulnerability and desire to retain control even as she knows she has to give it up. Perhaps appropriately, the people who took most notice of the symbolism of Nettie and Nellie were representatives of the Inn

themselves, some of whom were offended.[734] Howard says that it was not her intention "to point fingers", rather that she had thought the clown mode in which the characters were played would lessen the offense. This is likely true but, to my mind, made them less effective as symbols of xenophobia. While Jibril's stories were taken very seriously, the Nettie and Nellie characters framed the neighbourhood's lack of welcome to newcomers (their racism and classism in other words) as relatively harmless and benign. The personal relationships established through *Bridge of One Hair* as a whole did begin to break down discriminatory attitudes in the area, but Nettie and Nellie did not seem very productive in that regard.

It is interesting to think about other potential relational approaches, which might have been further explored in *Bridge of One Hair*. Tea drinking and the offering of tea as a form of hospitality was a recurring motif in the work, inspired by the shared emphasis on tea services at the Inn and in Somali cultural practice. The imperial history of tea was discussed in meetings between lead artists but wasn't worked in to the final show or into any parts of the artistic process that I am aware of. This might, for example, have been a productive and stimulating site of enquiry, creating further relationships between 'here' and 'there'. It might also have been interesting to look at the parallels between Irish emigration in the face of famine (in the early days of Montgomery's Inn) and Somali emigration in the face of war. Both groups experienced prejudice upon their arrival, encountered a diverse mix of cultures in their new home and have struggled to make a place here, while retaining a strong sense of 'home'.

Sidd Bobb as Orator. Photograph by Katherine Fleitas. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre

Faduma Nkruma's Closing Recitation. Photograph by Katherine Fleitas. Courtesy of Jumblies

Theatre.

Jumblies Sign in Mabelle. Photograph by Loree Lawrence. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Quilt of Mabelle Buildings. Photograph by Day Milman. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

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Hawa Jibril. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre. Photograph by Deborah Barndt.

Teapot with Where I'm From Poetry. Photograph by Katherine Fleitas. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre

Shadya Yasin plays the young Hawa Jibril. Photograph by Katherine Fleitas. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Ruth Howard with Faduma Ahmed-Alim. Photograph by Day Milman. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

mapping

- this is where I live now..
  what are the things you like about the places?

- this is where I was born..
  What did you bring with you? What did you leave behind?

- this is where I lived next..
  what are the things you don't like about the places?

- show how you got from one place to the next...
  → where have you travelled to?
  → what are your favorite places to hang out?
  → where is your school?

Mapping Instructions for Personal Maps. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.
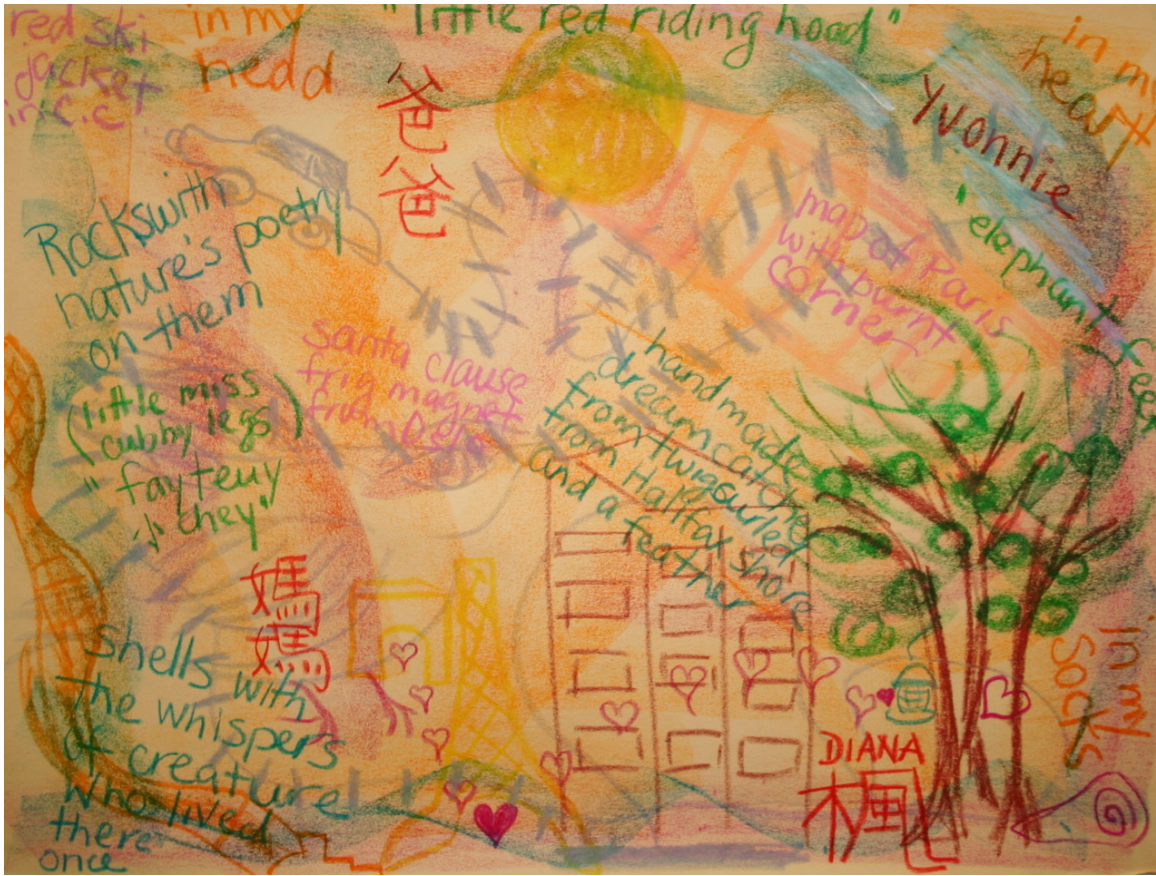
Associate Artist's Personal Map. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Mabelle Youth Open for the 2006 Performance. Photograph by Deborah Barndt. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Faduma Nkruma's Recitation in the 2006 Performance. Photograph by Deborah Barndt. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Performers from Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre. Photograph by Katherine Fleitas. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Nettie and Nellie in the 2006 Performance. Photograph by Deborah Barndt. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Bridge of One Hair Final Bows. Photograph by Katherine Fleitas. Courtesy of Jumblies Theatre.

Contesting Place

In examining the "slippery" nature of place, geographer Tim Cresswell (2004) reminds us that place is simultaneously a physical location (a coordinate on a map), a discursive construction (a fantasy), and a way of understanding the world (a concept, a category of analysis).[735] While I have focused on the ways in which *Bridge of One Hair* reflected a progressive geographical imagination in this paper, I have in fact slipped back and forth between these three meanings of place. *Bridge of One Hair* challenged the politics of place at all three levels outlined by Cresswell. The project challenged the embodied practices of Mabelle and the Village of Islington as separate, coherent places; the fantasy of place projected by the Village of Islington B.I.A, and; the bounded and rooted way in which place as a concept was understood by residents and visitors alike. It challenged the parochial politics of place that were dominant at a local scale in the Dundas/Islington area by framing the area as internally heterogeneous, a site of multiple trajectories, always in process and relationally constituted. I will turn now, briefly, to how *Bridge of One Hair* interfaced with discursive constructions of Toronto and of Canada.

Getting Relationally Specific: Toronto's Spatial Politics and Canadian Nationalism

One of the reasons I propose Massey's theoretical work on place as an evaluative criteria for site-specific participatory art is to address the danger that site-specific projects will abdicate responsibility for social conditions beyond their

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immediate reach, thereby making the social change they claim to effect less effective or, at times, even harmful. I have shown in this chapter that, in many ways, *Bridge of One Hair* reached beyond immediate local concerns, making relationships between places and embodying a broad geographical imagination. It is also important, however, to look at how *Bridge of One Hair* functioned at the scale of the city and at a national scale. In Chapter Four of this dissertation I argue that different parts of Toronto are discursively constructed in relation to each other, with some areas of the city framed as *places that matter* (as 'global places) in juxtaposition to other areas (for the most part outside of Toronto's downtown core), which are relegated to the margins in mainstream discourse (framed either as a cultural voids or as dangerous areas to be avoided and always as 'local'). I argue that socially engaged artists are actors in these discursive constructions of important, global and mobile places on the one hand and peripheral, local and rooted place on the other. In light of this, I suggest that contesting misrepresentation of a marginalized neighbourhood in Toronto also necessitates contesting its counterparts, the areas against which it is juxtaposed. This is why it is important for site-specific projects in Toronto to approach place relationally, paying close attention to the dialectical relationship between placemaking and displacement within the city.

How did *Bridge of One Hair* contest or reify discursive constructions of place at a city-wide scale? On one hand the project identified the Dundas/Islington area, and particularly Mabelle, a marginalized neighbourhood in an already peripheral part of the city, as culturally vibrant. The project challenged

the dominant sense that some places in the city are hotbeds of culture while others are backwaters. Over the years, *Bridge of One Hair* drew many outside audiences to the area by offering cultural experiences there. One could argue as well that the choice to bring *Bridge of One Hair's* final performance to Harbourfront challenged these constructions. By taking the final performance to Harbourfront, Jumblies insisted that art made on the 'peripheries' had a place in the 'cultural heart' of the city.

But the story is not that simple. Community arts companies like Jumblies not only produce work in and about marginalized urban neighbourhoods because they believe that they too deserve cultural recognition but also because that's what they can get funding for. A major funder for *Bridge of One Hair* was the Toronto Community Housing "Social Investment Fund" (SIF). SIF's mandate is: "to support community initiatives that contribute to improving the quality of life for Toronto Community Housing tenants."[736] Funds like this push community artists to work in community housing and low-income areas. As Howard and many others have noted, this can lead artists toward a role of service or patronage, thereby remarginalizing people in already marginalized areas. This is particularly true if there is the sense that the people who lead the culture-making only come from outside of the neighbourhood or if there is a sense that standards for artistic quality are lower for such so-called 'community art.' This is not a case against 'outside' artists per se (nor against a particular set of evaluative standards for work in this field) but a social factor to consider when examining any such project. Artists and participants who work in this field are inevitably tangled up in

harmful constructions of place and identity, making it difficult to frame the work in non-paternalistic ways, not as a form of service but as a shared exploration of place.

There is also a push to highlight the diversity and vibrancy of Toronto through cultural events in Toronto, as part of tourism promotion and place marketing. This is a widespread phenomenon. Kwon writes:

> inasmuch as the current socio-economic order thrives on the (artificial) production and (mass) consumption of difference (for difference sake), the siting of art in "real" places can also be a means to *extract* the social and historical dimensions out of places to variously serve the thematic drive of an artist, satisfy institutional demographic profiles, or fulfill the fiscal needs of a city….. as… endeavors to engage art in the nurturing of specificities of locational difference gather momentum, there is a greater and greater urgency in distinguishing between the *cultivation* of art and places and their *appropriation* for the promotion of cities as cultural commodities.[737]

I have already discussed how *Bridge of One Hair* contributed to the cultivation of place. Did it also contribute to the appropriation of what Kwon calls 'locational difference' for city promotion? How did it challenge that possible appropriation? I want to consider the final production at the Harbourfront Centre with those questions in mind.

When Jumblies moved *Bridge of One Hair* to the Harbourfront Centre for final rehearsals and the run of the show, the company attempted to bring both the neighbourhood context and their artistic process with them. On their way into the theatre for the show, audience members moved through a visual arts installation that included images of the neighbourhood and documentation of the process of creating *Bridge of One Hair*. Jumblies also negotiated with

Harbourfront to ensure that many of the tickets would be reserved for community members from Etobicoke and clashed with the Centre's personnel over issues such as who catered meals for the large cast and crew and, admission of late arrivals. In both of these cases Jumblies won out (hiring people from the neighbourhood to cater and letting latecomers in). In the daytimes during the show's run Jumblies used the Harbourfront theatre space to showcase performances by other community groups. Howard felt in hindsight that Jumblies had significantly disrupted Harbourfront as a cultural space, "invading" it in "a community artsy way" with children, dancing, drumming and food.[738]

These efforts to bring the neighbourhood and Jumblies' values to Harbourfront partially mitigated but did not make up for the fact that a significant portion of the audience during the final run of the show were not from the Dundas/Islington area and were therefore unaware of the local politics of place to which the production, in part, responded. Nor did the show's written program make any explicit reference to these politics. To what extent, then, did this project challenge rosy portrayals of Toronto as a harmonious place of "diversity," in which newcomers are welcome and it is the prerogative of white Anglo settlers to welcome them? The fact that Howard herself is a white downtown artist, who was working in partnership with a City of Toronto museum with a largely racialized group of people might tip the optics in this direction, despite the emphasis in the show on displacements.

In response to Massey's 1995 essay 'A Global Sense of Place', Jon May has pointed out that emphases on places as a sites of multiplicities and flows (as

'meeting places') can remain at the level of an aesthetic 'appreciation' of racial difference.[739] It would be an interesting task to compare Massey's argument for place as a 'meeting place' to the rhetoric of Toronto as a welcoming 'meeting place' in which all people have an equal shot at the good life. Even as *Bridge of One Hair* tried to challenge the colonial encrustations of place at a local level, it may yet have inadvertently contributed to them via the performance at Harbourfront. The unease, the tensions and the 'out of place' feelings which ran through the project and informed the narrative content of the show were not necessarily evident in the embodiment of the final performance, which to an outside eye likely looked like a remarkable and harmonious coming together. What the audience saw of the artistic process (a large group of diverse residents working incredibly well together to pull of an ambitious theatrical production) belied the show's narrative content, which referenced displacement and social alienation. Unfortunately, I fear that it was possible for established and more privileged Canadians to feel self-congratulatory or nationalistic as they watched an incredibly diverse cast take on the near impossible task of coming together to perform a complex musical score, dance numbers, poetry and all manner of spectacle. The attitudes that have created income disparity, a lack of institutional support for refugees and new immigrants and, crumbling infrastructure in the city's inner suburbs were not questioned (though they were perhaps implicitly challenged in the reception of the Hawa character by Nettie and Nellie).

Here, too, a relational approach might have more deeply challenged dominant impressions of Toronto as a place. How could the audience have been

implicated in the unease that ran like an undercurrent through the rest of the artistic process? Could greater unease have been combined with the sense of joy, celebration and hospitality that made the show so moving? After the final show, a Somali participant told Howard: "We are Canadians now. This shows it. This is a new beginning for us. Things are going to be better for us now."[740] But we know that Canada's multicultural discourse has a tricky way of subsuming stories and practices 'from elsewhere' even as the centre of white-Anglo cultural power holds. Art and culture alone don't make social change. They *can* do this in tandem with organizations and social movements, acting as "rain readying the crops"[741] but the process of creating *Bridge of One Hair*, as powerful as it was, did nothing to alter the systemic barriers to full participation in Canadian society for anyone. This statement, then, was bittersweet. On one hand it showed the extent to which the project made at least Somali participants feel culturally recognized and an increased their sense of belonging in Toronto and in Canada. On the other, it serves as reminder that the Jumblies artistic process was never more than a bubble, existing in a city and a country of profound inequities.

In a very moving part of the *Bridge of One Hair* final show, the audience was invited into the story (and implicitly into the community of performers) when each audience member was served a cup of Somali tea by those on stage. On the one hand this was yet another contestation of place through hospitality, a reversal of the welcoming ritual, in which a primarily marginalized cast that is not from downtown welcomes a downtown audience, in an affluent cultural venue. It was a powerful affective moment (as one audience member put it "the offering of

tea [was] what set me weeping"[742]). At the same time, it fit into a multicultural

model in which ethnically specific foods and cultural rituals are shared outside of

a historical context or troubling of power. A significant amount of what was

politically challenging about the project had been, to my mind, lost in translation.

What *was* powerfully conveyed in that moment was hospitality, greeting, and

recognition of our common presence in that room at Harbourfront. This was a

powerful form of being together, but it did not necessarily bear the traces of

exclusion that made it so bittersweet for the participants and audience who were

'in the know.'

Dilemmatic Space? Social Engagement Revisited

I argued in Chapter Four that an important challenge for site-specific participatory

projects is to produce *new forms of belonging* out of critical disorientation, a

sense of 'the wrong place'. In many ways *Bridge of One Hair* did precisely this,

bringing people together through affective relationships premised on exploring

how they did and did *not* fit in a place together. This is clear upon review of how

Bridge of One Hair took up Massey's progressive concept of place. In Chapter

Four I also offered political philosopher Bonnie Honig's concept of dilemmatic

space as a lens through which to consider site-specific projects. Honig argues

that, rather than yearn for homespaces and identities that are free of dilemma,

we should engage with the dilemmas that attend every moment of social

existence, building new political solidarities and coalitions out of our attention to

these dilemmas. I will conclude this chapter by considering *Bridge of One Hair*

through the lens of dilemmatic space. I want to preface this analysis with the

caveat that every individual involved in the project (of which there were hundreds) had different experiences and formed different social relationships through the project, making it impossible to assess the breadth of private dilemmatic spaces opened up by the project. There are some clues, however, as to how Jumblies did and did not foster dilemmatic spaces in a *public* way.

Early in the *Bridge of One Hair* project Howard noted in a draft document that "it is very important to consider and say what we mean by "developing community", because it can mean anything at all - and it's the ideas of bridges, changing perspectives, inclusion - and creativity/art as part of all of this and for its own sake, that is where we come in…"[743] I have just suggested that *Bridge of One Hair* did not per se create a dilemmatic space for its final audience, making it possible to experience the final production without awareness of the dilemmas inherent in living in Toronto and being Canadian. It does seem, though, that Howard's artistic sensibilities tend towards dilemmatic spaces, even as she approaches them subtly. First, clearly, building one's career and life around shared practice with such a diverse range of other artists and people living in neighbourhoods where there is not social cohesion (as Howard and her Jumblies team have done) *is* to seek out risky and dilemmatic spaces. Through this kind of work artists and participants are inevitably confronted with their own limitations and forced to learn and to grow. The entire practice of *Bridge of One Hair* could be seen as a conscious engagement with a dilemmatic space. What is interesting, though, is that Jumblies (and perhaps the Colway model of community plays more broadly) takes what could be characterized as a

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'backdoor' approach to the dilemmas of social life. The company explicitly focuses on shared moments of celebration and on creating positive social relationships through storytelling, imagery and performance, even as Howard consciously takes the company into dilemmatic spaces; spaces where social 'bridges' are needed, spaces that are incredibly diverse in terms of class, race, age, ability and other socially constructed categories, and spaces where social desires conflict with one another. While Jumblies does not tend toward easy 'communities' (to the extent that any community is easy) neither does it tend toward facilitating or making room for overt discussions of what makes these spaces dilemmatic- of social conflict or of power. Instead, Jumblies engages with these spaces through artmaking processes that veer away from conflict and towards common ground.

I appreciate this approach as I have seen its very real positive lived effects. I experienced the sense of common purpose and joy that permeated the final days of the 2007 production of *Bridge of One Hair* (along with stress and anxiety, of course) and have found much of the artistic work Jumblies produces very moving. Perhaps what Jumblies does is lay a foundation for alliances and difficult conversations between residents in the future. The practice of shared rituals and celebrations no doubt gives neighbours more hope of success in future difficult dialogues, as a process of listening and positive relationships have already been built. Political philosopher Iris Marion Young proposes an emphasis on greeting, rhetoric and storytelling as grounds for improved

democratic processes, as these can foster both empathy and individual awareness of our own partiality.[744] Jumblies incorporates all of these elements.

At the same time, I am troubled by how a focus on inclusivity via shared celebration can allow for moments in which systemic privileges and oppressions, which inevitably run through every Jumblies project (as they do any social process) are ignored. These cannot be 'bracketed' and put aside in any shared practice.[745] Systemic power makes it harder to 'bridge' certain relationships than others and makes the terms of the 'bridging' inequitable. What one group gets from it is not the same as what another does. Some groups are more easily able to walk away while others are not. This is the "power-geometry" of place that Massey writes about.

Throughout the *Bridge of One Hair* artistic process there seemed to be a sense among the artistic team that delving too overtly into questions of systemic power might cause the project to break down altogether. This may have been largely a result of the pressure of an ambitious project in what, despite its relative length vis-à-vis many artistic processes, felt like a short period of time. It may also have been amplified by Jumblies' drive towards virtuosity. In the push to achieve aesthetic greatness there may have been fear that the artistic process would be too derailed by difficult discussions about privilege and power and how they functioned, both in the neighbourhood and in the project itself. I can appreciate this pressure. I was left, however, with an uneasy feeling that some such conversations were necessary in order to build bridges that were stronger than 'one hair,' bridges that could bear the weight of divergent perspectives,

conflicting needs and conflicting visions for the future of the neighbourhood or the city.

Honig reminds us that "[i]f home is to be a positive force in politics, it must itself be recast in coalitional terms as a *differentiated* site of necessary, nurturing, but also strategic, conflicted and temporary alliances."[746] In many ways *Bridge of One Hair* embodied that recast vision of home and challenged the kind of "home yearning" that Honig says is dangerous, yearning for a "womb-like universe unriven by difference, conflicts or dilemmas, a well-ordered and welcoming place."[747] Jumblies purposefully placed themselves in the heart of a "dilemmatic space"- a space riven with power, prejudices, conflicting visions, and difference. At the same time, some points in the artistic process evaded "dilemmas" (i.e. situations in which there was no easy fit or solution). The youth troupe in 2006, for example, did not only express hurt feelings about feeling marginalized in the mid-process show (though they *did* do this, in somewhat angry tones, understandably and as is typical of teenagers). They also created a dilemma for Jumblies' lead artists by making themselves difficult to fit into the themes and artistic forms that were already becoming part of the show. Here was a challenge that could have been taken up, albeit with extraordinary effort. How might this moment in the process played out differently if the artistic team had been encouraged to explicitly embrace this dilemma? While the team went to considerable lengths to include the youth (bringing in more and more facilitators, offering specific workshops they were interested in, etcetera) the premise of inclusion did not go far enough in that moment. Is it adequate as an axis for

social engagement? A conscious search for "dilemma", as framed by Honig, might have helped to turn this challenge into an opportunity to take the process in a new direction.

And yet, even as I write this, I think that the fact that Jumblies takes a 'backdoor' approach to social differences and power may be what allows them to create shared moments of joy and celebration. There are ways in which shared focus on creating something of beauty together allows for social growth where otherwise there might just be obstacles. Social relations are strengthened through the fun of coming together, the joy of hearing and seeing our own and other's stories performed spectacularly and the creative realization of something beyond any individual's capacity. From this perspective I can see why to derail the process, thereby threatening the spectacular realization of something beautiful, is dangerous for Jumblies. In her inspired meditation on the radical potential of performance, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre*, performance theorist Jill Dolan offers the concept of 'communitas' as a means through which to consider:

> the moments in a theater event or a ritual in which audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way; spectators' individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them, and a cohesive if fleeting feeling of belonging to the group bathes the audience.[748]

It is this "communitas" that Jumblies creates for the participants that remain a part of their processes, both through heightened moments in the artistic process and in heightened moments in the performances themselves, such as the

offering of tea that so profoundly moved the audience in *Bridge of One Hair*.

Dolan argues that such moments are radical in that they offer us glimpses of

what a more socially connected, equitable form of society might look like.[749]

Herein lies the paradox of *Bridge of One Hair*, as an instance of site-specific

coming together. While Jumblies' avoidance of overt engagement with power and

conflict at times prevented active inclusion in its truest sense, their focus on

shared celebration was also what made the artistic process powerful.

Conclusion: 'Easy to Say'

Howard and her colleague Rachael Van Fossen title a paper on the Colway form

"Easy to Say."[750] While it is easy to speak about the creation of dilemmatic

spaces and about social inclusion, *Bridge of One Hair* is a case study in the

complexities of socially engaged site-specific art in Toronto. Howard has said

that Jumblies has a "quixotic central vision – mixing things that are hard to mix,

and creating art so this mixing can be done with integrity and quality."[751]

Attempting to bring together the many disparate elements and groups that make

up any neighbourhood in Toronto is indeed like walking a bridge of one hair.

There are bound to be slips and falls, and it takes tenacity to get back up and

keep trying. The success Jumblies has had in walking this bridge, and that they

continue to choose to do so, is nothing short of remarkable. In large part, I think

their success has to do with their open approach to place, and with Howard's

personal love for and drive towards this field of work.

It also seems important to note that, to a certain extent, I have held *Bridge of One Hair* to task on questions it had no intention of confronting, reading it through the lenses of evaluative criteria that were not Jumblies' own criteria. Howard was less interested in place than in social inclusion in *Bridge of One Hair,* less interested in history than in storytelling and visual and aural spectacle. It is not, therefore, a failure on the part of the Jumblies artistic team that they did not explore the relationship between social conflict in the early days of the Inn, for example, and social conflict today in the area. This was not their focus. Close analysis of *Bridge of One Hair*, however, shows some of the complexity of bringing people together on the premise of a shared place in a city like Toronto to work together.

Penny Couchie, reflecting on the diversity of ages and ethnic backgrounds in the project for the final *Bridge of One Hair* program, writes:

> For me, Bridge of One Hair is a play about what connects us, the strength, the agility, the tenacity, the belief, the courage, the grace and the curiosity it takes to cross such a precarious bridge and the incredible rewards of fighting for community. Ultimately, it's a reminder that there's always time for tea.[752]

To my mind as well, it is their fight for community in the face of both difference and alienated urban relations that makes Jumblies so remarkable. Nonetheless, I suggest the concept of dilemmatic space in place of a premise of inclusion. What a consideration of dilemmatic space can bring to socially engaged art practices is awareness of the gaps, the dilemmas that attend every instance of coming together. The potential for social transformation is increased when artists probe

for dilemma and strive to consider who or what (which issues, which conversations) is not in the room. I am reminded here of PEN Canada's practice of keeping an empty chair at every event they host, each time the symbol of a different imprisoned writer. To consider dilemmatic space in this instance is a similar premise. It seems important to hold on to the empty chair, the absence and to try to conceive of the bridges that were not crossed even as we celebrate togetherness, presence and the bridges that were built. While this is something Howard does personally and has committed her life work to, it is something we must also do in public as we participate in and reflect on socially engaged art practices.

Chapter Six - Working Place: The
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY

"If place is viewed simply as site, its 'secondary qualities' denied, then it becomes easier to destroy it; one cannot mourn what one denied ever being in existence."
> \- Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, Art Works Place.

"Justice is what love looks like in public."
> -Cornel West, 2011.[753]

Prologue: August 2011, Downtown Toronto

It's the middle of the day in the middle of the week during what is usually one of the quietest times of year in this city. These are typically the dog days of summer, a lackadaisical time when news stories are filler, government is on a break and people pay less attention than usual to issues of civic concern.

But this summer the city is agitated. The recently elected Mayor, Rob Ford, has vowed to dramatically reduce city spending in a sped-up budgeting process for 2012. Ford was elected in October 2010 on a platform of "respect for taxpayers" and has made waves since taking office, most notably with a demand that all city departments come up with a plan to cut their costs by 10%.[754] On the table are childcare subsidies; housing loans and legal services for tenants; bus routes; seniors services and long-term care; water fluoridation; theatres and museums; garbage collection and snow removal; cycling infrastructure and more.[755] Activist coalitions like the Stop the Cuts Network, progressive organizations like Social Planning Toronto, representatives of social services and public sector unions are all desperately mobilizing against Ford's agenda to try to

prevent service loss. Just a few weeks ago they drew hundreds of deputants to City Hall to speak about the importance of municipal services, turning an executive committee meeting into an almost 24 hour "marathon."[756] While, on the surface, today looks like any other late summer day outside Metro Hall (a tall office building which houses various City of Toronto operations) the city is simmering with anxiety and debate.

Enter two uniformed women, both in navy blue coveralls, one wearing orange safety stripes and another a yellow hard hat. Between them they drag a large garbage can on casters, out of which sticks a broom, a mop, some rags and two clipboards. Upon entering Metro Hall the women roll their supplies to the foyer outside the Urban Affairs Library, a reference library housed inside the building, and begin to set up. One pulls the mop and a rag from the can. Another takes a clipboard and pen. They spread out, one moving away from the library entrance to mop the floors of the foyer. The other situates herself by the library door with her clipboard. When a library user comes out through the door, she begins to speak to him, hesitantly at first: "Hi there, I'm with the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY. Today we're gathering memories of the Urban Affairs library, which is slated to close this September. Could you spare a few minutes to speak with me about this library?"

And so the conversation begins.

This chapter examines my own project, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY, a site-specific participatory public art project I have developed and undertaken along with visual artist Elinor Whidden. Since 2011, Whidden and I have created an unusual methodology through which to foster civic dialogue about the past, present and possible futures of public services in Toronto. Bringing together visual art, text, performance and public gatherings we engage our audiences in conversation about specific services they access and about the broader trajectory of the city.

In this chapter I trace the evolution of the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY and analyze the project vis-à-vis the analytical lenses I developed in Chapter Four. I describe how this project has become increasingly participatory and discuss our reasons for working both site-specifically and 'dialogically.'[757] While Whidden and I initially envisioned this project as an agit-prop urban intervention, in which we would guerilla install critical signage throughout the city to highlight an invisible infrastructure of threatened public services, we have ended up creating a participatory model of engagement, which includes site-specific conversations with strangers, partnerships with social institutions, and large live gatherings in public space, at which service users and staff share site-specific memories and their hopes for the future of these services. I discuss the reasons why we have developed this approach and what our experience thus far has taught us about the affective power of site-specificity. In particular, I describe the DEPARTMENT's experiences carrying out our artistic process in full at two sites: The Ralph Thornton Community Centre (south Riverdale, Toronto) and

Perram House (Sherbourne and Wellesley area, Toronto). Working site-specifically to remember these two services led, from my perspective, to evocative, personal and subjective conversations and public events.

I then turn to the challenges of working site-specifically in this project and to some of the ways in which the DEPARTMENT may *not* be embodying the relational approach to place that I have argued is important. The first challenge has been developing institutional partnerships. Service providers feel threatened in the current political climate and as a consequence their directors are often loathe to appear even remotely critical of government. And, yet, many staff and service-users want to talk about how services and other public infrastructure are changing. The difficulty we have had finding sites to partner with illuminates the ways in which these sites are deeply contested and has forced us to confront the impossibility of working site-specifically without a certain level of antagonism or, at the least, unease. These are dilemmatic sites indeed. A second challenge of working site-specifically in this project has been working in different parts of the city. This is imperative to the project yet practically very difficult. As I outlined in Chapter Four, Toronto is an increasingly polarized city, both economically and politically. The uneven geography of the city played out in the 2010 election in which Rob Ford was elected mayor. Post-election analysis showed that support for Ford strong on the peripheries of the city, while those who voted against him lived, for the most part, downtown (particularly along the Bloor-Danforth subway line). Ford's election and the civic battles that ensued during his tenure at City Hall represented deeply different visions for the future of this city. Added to this is

the material reality that no service exists in isolation. Service cuts in one place inevitably affect services elsewhere. In light of this, a hyperlocal approach to this project (working with only one neighbourhood, for example) doesn't make sense. Torontonians need to consider the city as a whole and to engage in cross-city dialogue. I discuss the ways in which funder's expectations, the geographies of social networks and the affective power of face-to-face dialogue make it challenging to embody the progressive spatial imagination advocated by Massey in this project.

Finally, I conclude this chapter with an analysis of the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY in light of Honig's concept of dilemmatic space. This project, I argue, both examines the city as a dilemmatic space and represents a dilemmatic space for Whidden and me as artists. Because it involves a form of public interviews (we call our process 'memory collection') the project requires careful thinking about questions of voice and authority. I begin with a note on my own vantage point in this research and what it means for my analysis of the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY.

My Position as Artist/Researcher

This case study is a mid-process reflection on a project I co-founded and am undertaking as one member of a two-person art collective. I am therefore entirely implicated in the project. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, this means both that I have unique insights into the project and that I write from a particular and limited perspective. Clearly, analysis of one's own project calls for an increased

commitment to self-reflexivity. There is no question of my "biased" position in relation to this project. In the end I am responsible to all questions regarding the ethics, politics and aesthetic choices in this project. In this chapter I slide between discussion of the artistic intentions behind the project and what I have learned from the execution of these intentions. Because I co-created DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY with the concerns I have outlined in Chapter Four already in mind, I cannot strictly evaluate the project through the lenses of geographical imagination, relational specificity and dilemmatic space but also find myself explaining our artistic choices as they relate to these lenses.

Also, as is the case for all of the projects I analyze in this dissertation, I can only speak in a limited way about reception of the project. I do discuss how the project has been received at certain points in this chapter, but with the understanding that I have a limited vantage point in this regard, as others who share their feedback on the project with me are aware that they are speaking with one of the project's two lead artists.

Finally, I am conscious as I write this chapter that so many of the insights I have gained while working on this project have emerged through discussion with my partner in this project, Elinor Whidden. It is difficult to disentangle my own realizations about the project from those we have arrived at together.

Introducing "the DEPARTMENT"

The DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY is a collaboration between myself and visual artist Elinor Whidden, who has a background in sculpture and

performance and is a longtime friend and colleague of mine. This project grew out of our collective experience and interests, beginning with my proposal to Whidden in 2011 that we collaborate to address the threat of widespread cuts to Toronto's public services by making counter-monumental street signs, somewhat akin to those produced by REPOhistory. Whidden countered by suggesting that we add a performance element- could we be characters, some form of civic workers, installing the signs? From here we came up with the idea to call ourselves "DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY" and to cast ourselves as an underfunded yet important service in our own right. It was from that premise that Whidden and I designed the aesthetic parameters of the street signs that we now make in this project, our uniforms and, our performance style. As I will discuss shortly, our methodology of one-on-one public conversations and collective memory sharing would come later.

From the beginning, our goal as the DEPARTMENT was to counter what we see as shortsighted dismantling of public services by providing historical perspective on the social struggles through which these services came to exist and by highlighting their significance in the lives of Toronto residents. We would mark all types of public infrastructure and 'services', we decided, including; community programs, public housing, parks and recreation, health services, transit, libraries and arts and culture. Anything that was publicly funded, contributed to public life and was either threatened by cuts or closed due to loss of funding would be our purview. Our goal remains broadly the same as I write this three years later but has become simultaneously more nuanced and broader

as we have developed the project. We no longer only work with programs,

services or sites that are directly threatened by budget cuts. And we spend *much*

longer than we had initially imagined working with each site. I will address our

changes in practice throughout this chapter.

Whidden and I began in the summer of 2011 with what was in retrospect a

naïve plan- a plan to produce twelve site-specific signs ('12 for 2012') over a few

months. Installing these overnight in late September 2011 would, we thought,

make a media splash, contributing to the larger conversation about service cuts

in the lead up to City Council's vote on the 2012 budget. With this plan in mind

we approached Social Planning Toronto (SPT) and asked for their help making

contact with a diverse range of service providers that were spread out

geographically. We were aware of the need to highlight services in all parts of the

city. With the help of SPT we came up with a draft list of threatened services in

"mushy middle" wards, jurisdictions represented by councilors who were as of yet

undecided as to how they would vote on service cuts.[758] At this point we

conceived the project as an activist intervention into the current politics of the

city. It was designed to play a direct role in determining the outcome of the vote

on the City's 2012 budget, contributing to activist efforts to prevent service cuts.

As it turned out, however, the DEPARTMENT never made its '12 for 2012' signs.

Instead, we found ourselves in the thick of a process we now call "memory

collection" when the vote on the City budget rolled around in January 2012. Our

project had begun to shift from a short-lived agit-prop intervention to something

more long-term and premised on a very different kind of site-specific

engagement. A close examination of this shift makes up the bulk of my analysis in this chapter.

Through the winter and spring of 2012 Whidden and I continued to build relationships with service providers and spoke with dozens of Toronto residents about services they value, gathering their memories through a careful process we had designed. I will describe our approach to these public conversations shortly. In early 2012 we also prepared for and participated in the *33rd Rhubarb Festival*, a performance festival at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. At *Rhubarb* we took two different audiences to service sites (the "Scarborough Rocket", a bus route facing service reductions, and the Toronto Reference Library, which was still threatened at that time by budget cuts) to "work a shift" with the DEPARTMENT. On route to these sites we taught our audience (turned participants) how to conduct "memory collection" respectfully and well.[759] The DEPARTMENT also hosted a large performance event in the theatre itself, which we conceived as the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY's first ever Annual General Meeting.[760] At this event Whidden and I presented our work thus far (in role as DEPARTMENT workers) and then, with the help of three other specially trained DEPARTMENT workers, broke our audience into groups to review the DEPARTMENT's archives for five different sites.[761] Through a facilitated process, each group engaged with the lived memories and historical data we'd gathered about a specific service and brainstormed possible designs for a sign to honour that site. In the spring we staged a second meeting, similar to the one at *Rhubarb*, for the *Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts*.[762]

In May 2012 we received an email from a member of the Board of Directors of the Ralph Thornton Community Centre (RTC), a community centre in south Riverdale, asking for our help. RTC's longtime computer resource centre was closing after losing their provincial funding. The board wanted to honour the legacy of the resource centre and to help their community of clients, staff and volunteers to grieve its loss. As I will describe in greater detail shortly, the DEPARTMENT collaborated with RTC over a period of six weeks, gathering memories from service users, creating a commemorative sign for the centre, and installing the sign on the exterior of the building as part of a large event marking the closure of the computer resource centre. Our work with RTC showed us the power of hosting large gatherings in which memories are collectively shared and we now see these as crucial to our project. Over the course of 2012, we also continued to build an online following and were recipients of an Ontario Arts Council (OAC) Integrated Arts grant to work on our project in 2013.

Thanks to the OAC, Whidden and I worked full-time as the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY in the summer of 2013. We continued to build relationships with service providers and users; created archives for a number of new sites (including harm reduction programming at a community health centre, and the Toronto Friendship Centre, a drop in site that ran an early morning meal program); working intensively with ex-staff of Perram House, an end of life hospice that closed in April 2013, and; completed the creation of signs for three sites: Toronto Reference Library, Bloor Gladstone Library and Perram House. In October 2013 we hosted a large public memorial in front of Perram House, at

which we unveiled our commemorative sign for the hospice and caregivers who had worked at the hospice shared their memories with the audience.

In recent months the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY has embarked on a new round of collaboration with service sites, thanks to grants from the Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council. We have worked with Warden Woods, a multi-service agency in Scarborough, honouring a homeless drop-in meal program at one of their sites. We collaborated with the Parkdale Community Health Centre to create a sign and large public event honouring their harm reduction programming after they lost their municipal funding. And we commemorated the closure of a municipally-run daycare, highlighting both its recent history and its role as the first federally funded childcare centre in all of Canada (during the second world war). We have also begun a collaboration with the Working Women Community Centre (which connects immigrant women with employment opportunities) and are in talks with staff from Toronto's Community Legal Clinics, which are threatened with closures. Finally, we have redesigned our website so that it can function both as an online 'memory archive', a repository of the hundreds of memories we have gathered, and as a form of social engagement unto itself. We want to share the rich and evocative memories we have collected through our website and now see this as a critical element of our project.

The "DEPARTMENT" is also in the midst of trying to secure more funds, from unions, arts councils and private sector donations. This project could continue to grow indefinitely. As I will discuss further in this chapter, while it

continues to be difficult to find the right sites to work with, our partnerships thus

far in this project have been, from what we can tell, for the most part deeply

appreciated by the people we have partnered with. Whidden and I continue to

feel artistically excited by both the potential and challenges of this project. The

memories service users and staff are sharing with us could shapeshift into written

publications, audio installations, many more signs, further performance events

and an interactive website. We would like to see this through. Our vision at this

point is to secure enough money to make signs for at least twelve service sites in

total, to host many more site-specific performances at which a sign is unveiled

and a site is remembered collectively by the people who attend.

It is evident then, that I am writing about this project in the midst of a work

in progress. Even this far in to the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY's

process, however, this project offers interesting insights into the relationship

between site-specificity and social engagement in the context of Toronto. I turn

now to those insights, beginning with a discussion of our reasons for working

site-specifically and 'dialogically' in this project.

Making Place Work: Our Choice to Work Site-Specifically

Whidden and I decided to make site-specific signs for particular public

services for two related reasons. First, our goal was to make visible a largely

invisible social infrastructure, upon which the city crucially depends. While

neoliberal discourse has successfully brought wasteful government spending into

the public eye and fostered widespread demands for tax cuts, there is currently

very little public discussion about what taxes *legitimately* pay for. The social value of redistributed wealth in the form of libraries, schools, recreation centres, meal programs, employment centres and the many other institutions that support social life in the city is neither a popular subject in the mainstream media nor amongst our elected representatives at this juncture. Right now in Canada (and beyond) politicians of all political stripes are veering away from discussing the value of public investment in favour of promises to save taxpayers money and 'balance the books.' As Doreen Massey points out, neoliberalism has 'hijacked' our vocabulary: "Our current imaginings endow the market and its associated forms with a special status. We think of 'the economy' in terms of natural forces, into which we occasionally intervene, rather than in terms of a whole variety of social relations that need some kind of co-ordination."[763]

Whidden and I chose to work site-specifically in order to counter this naturalization of neoliberalism and to open up questions regarding our social responsibility to one another in the context of Toronto. We wanted to highlight the fact that to dismantle social infrastructure is much faster and easier than the very slow and laborious work of building or re-building it. A key initial interest for us was to look at the labour involved in building the social infrastructure we have today (joint labour by activists, volunteers and paid workers over centuries). We wanted to denaturalize neoliberal frames of the city and to contest the inevitability of any particular trajectory for social life. Questions we wanted to address through this project included: *How did our public services come to exist? Who fought for them? Who worked for them? How have they changed over the years?*

These would be the questions that would guide our research for each public service site.

Early into our meetings, Whidden and I decided that for each site we would make a unique street sign, the dimensions and iconography of which would be reminiscent of traffic signs, in reference to basic urban infrastructure that conducts the flows of social life. These would be non-nostalgic (we did not want to romanticize the welfare state), both hinting at the history of each service and, ideally, opening up dialogue about its future. In order to further draw attention to the labour involved in creating and maintaining social infrastructure, the DEPARTMENT would perform maintenance duties at each site after installation of our site-specific signs. In uniform as DEPARTMENT workers, we would sweep in front of each site, wash the windows, dust off the exterior of the building and perform other acts of care. These actions would emphasize each site as wounded[764] and in need of social energy. If our signs were removed (which we assumed they would be), we would return to mark their absence either by replacing them or by continuing to perform these acts of care, now for the exact site of the sign as well as for the institution it referred to. Our signs, we hoped, would function as counter-monuments[765] in that they would be temporary, marking sites of absence and implicating viewers in the uneasy histories represented. These were our initial plans. As I will describe shortly, how the project has come to function has in fact been quite different.

Not only did we choose to work site-specifically in order to mark an invisible infrastructure in the city but Whidden and I also wanted to wanted to

'ground' political discourse. Transnational austerity agendas, national cuts, provincial 'belt-tightening' and elimination of the municipal 'gravy train' (Toronto mayor Rob Ford's infamous phrase) are pitched to the public a-spatially, as though they won't come to home to roost in any particular place or for any particular groups of people. Current government speak has the unfortunate effect of dematerializing policies that will have material effects. Even phrases like 'service reductions' and 'budget cuts' obscure the lived effects of political decisions, often producing a far less emotional public response than they might, given the material effects these policies produce. Whidden and I wanted to bring politics and the emotional realm together and thought that we could do so by spatializing public cuts. *Where* would these cuts be felt? *Who* would feel them? How would Toronto residents be *specifically* affected? While we were asking big questions in this project (What are our social values? What is our responsibility to care for each other? How do we want to be cared for by others?) we wanted to think through these questions by learning about the micro-histories of specific services. Why does it matter that a certain drop-in meal program opens at 6 am? Why is a residential hospice a more desirable option than dying at home for some people? How is a neighbourhood impacted if a small computer resource centre closes? Who fought to start each program and why?

For the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY, then, working site-specifically has been an attempt to spatialize both investment and disinvestment in public infrastructure, to mark the sites of their effects. This approach to site-specificity frames the city as socially constructed (from both forces that are

internal to it and external forces). It also frames the city as a site of ongoing

contestations. Our goal has been to situate specific sites of public infrastructure

(a park, a library, a community centre, etc.) in a broader web of political agendas

and policy shifts, even as we attend to them in their particularities. This, in theory

at least, embodies the progressive sense of place that Massey proposes, treating

place as a constellation of trajectories, as formed by external forces as much as

internal ones.[766]

The scale this project started with is that of the city and our choice to

make street signs means that we continue to emphasize municipal infrastructure

visually, and an urban scale overall. We quickly learned, however, about the

complexity of scale, when we researched the funding streams for threatened

services. Public service sites are both built and dismantled by all levels of

government. Our work with each of these sites, then, is both hyperlocal (in the

sense that each site has its own particular culture, social relationships and

dynamics, the intricacies of which are fascinating) and part of a trajectory that

extends well beyond the city scale. It is for their specificities that service users

both value and disparage each of these sites but control of these sites is not only

in 'local' hands. As I will return to, this is a challenge that we grapple with in the

project.

Talking place: 'Memory collection'

While I argued in Chapter Four that site-specific socially engaged projects

are most interesting in that they are experiments in coming together and working

with and through different perspectives, Whidden and I initially made face-to-face conversation part of our artistic process for practical reasons. Archival and secondary research early in the project showed us that the kind of information we were looking for in order to make our signs simply didn't exist in written form. If we wanted to learn about the social histories of specific services we had to turn to oral history. It was at this point that we developed our performance-based research methodology, which we call 'memory collection'.

Memory collection allows us to gather lived memories and impressions of each service we investigate. In uniform as DEPARTMENT workers, we approach service users and staff one-on-one[767] and, after introducing ourselves and asking their permission, guide them through a series of questions about their relationship to a particular public service (a certain library branch or community program, for example). We have developed a series of 'memory collection forms' to guide these interviews. Some of the questions are not dissimilar from those one might encounter on a traditional public survey. They include:

What words do you associate with this service?
How has this service changed over the years?
Complete the sentence, "I've used this service since…"
What do you know about the history of this service?

We also ask 'right-brained' questions like: *If this service was a sound what sound would it be? Complete the sentence "I remember…"* and, "*In the best of all possible worlds this service would be…?"* We listen carefully to each individual's

answers, writing them verbatim by hand as they speak. When we have finished asking our guided questions we offer each person a chance to ask us about the DEPARTMENT and engage in informal conversation. Because we initially introduce ourselves as the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY, the people we speak with sometimes want to know more about who we work for and what we are doing. We answer honestly, explaining our project. No matter what anyone asks (surprisingly most people ask very little) we always seek permission to use people's words anonymously (both online and in our commemorative signs) and offer them our business card, which has both contact information and our website address.

We carefully honed our approach to 'memory collection' after coming to the shocking realization the first time we tried it in a public space that some people read us as a 'real' department despite our unusual uniforms, unusual questions and strange department name. The hard hat Whidden wears is cheap plastic, from a dollar store and intended to be part of a children's costume. We wear coveralls and drag a garbage can on wheels but work with clipboards and pens. We had not intended to dupe the people we spoke with (as some activist performers like *The Yes Men* do) but rather to glean their lived knowledge of the site (and also, perhaps, prompting them to consider the need for a 'department of public memory' at this juncture). When we realized that some people didn't read us as performers we increased the absurdity of our gestures by performing nonsensical tasks (mopping the sidewalk with a dry mop, for example) and also incorporated a final question to each person, which is *Do you have any questions*

about our DEPARTMENT? I will discuss the many different ways we have thought through the ethics and politics of this approach to social engagement later in this chapter, after I have introduced the rest of our artistic process. We have had to consider them very carefully.

After developing our "memory collection" methodology, Whidden and I attended a number of public gatherings in 2011 as the DEPARTMENT, including City Hall deputations, Social Planning Toronto breakfast meetings, meetings of the activist coalition Stop the Cuts*,* an event hosted by the Scarborough Civic Action Network and a mass public meeting in Dufferin Grove Park (organized by the Stop the Cuts network). At each meeting, we spoke with dozens of individuals about services they valued, gathering their memories of specific service sites and also marking the sites they told us about on a map of the city. It became clear through this process of memory collection that while there was overarching deep concern about cuts to public services in 2011, it was extremely difficult (even for full-time researchers and dedicated activists) to pinpoint actual sites where proposed cuts would be enacted. *Which* libraries would lose staff or close their doors? *Which* community programs would collapse if they lost municipal funding? *Which* daycares were struggling to survive? There were a handful of sites that were clearly on the chopping block (Riverdale Farm and the Urban Affairs Library for example) but, considering the size of the city and the level of proposed cuts, sites that anyone could point to were few and far between. Our desire to spatialize these cuts and to delve into their specific effects was already proving to be difficult.

Working Place: Site-Specific Dialogue

Early into our work as the DEPARTMENT we not only went to large civic actions and meetings but also to specific sites such as the Urban Affairs Library (the visit to which I described in the preface to this chapter). Our conversations with service users and staff at these sites showed us that site-specific memory collection (conversation about a specific place *in* that specific place) was much richer than memory collection in large civic gatherings that focused on generalized cuts. Since 2012 we have only conducted 'memory collection' site-specifically. I turn to our reasons for that now.

Surprisingly, we learned through our 'memory collection' at large general gatherings that, even as all city dwellers rely on public infrastructure, many people are unable to name specific public services they personally access. We asked attendants at these gatherings (presumably there because they were concerned about cuts) to name a service they particularly cared about or lived near. We found most middle-class participants were hard-pressed to speak in any specificity about services. Many of them found it hard to think of a particular service they personally relied on and, even if they could name something they used, very few of them could name services in their neighbourhood that they did not personally access. This reaffirmed our hunch that public infrastructure (beyond roads, and perhaps transit) remains largely unconsidered in public life, at least by those with a certain level of material privilege.

In distinction to this lack of specificity at meetings and public events, we were amazed by the particularity with which people described their relationships to services when we spoke with them on site at these services. Library users outside the Bloor-Gladstone library, for example, told us about how the library provides a cool place in summer and a warm place in the winter, about how while they were growing up the library was "like an oracle", how they value the physical features of the library, like the smooth touch of the counters, the fireplaces and the natural light. One shared a memory of her child's first library book, another marveled at how a librarian helped an elderly woman locate a Proust book based on her vague descriptions of it, another that this library had been open on Sundays a few years back. When we visited the Corner Drop-In meal program (a program suggested to us by the Executive Director of St. Stephen's Community House) we learned that it was much more than a meal program, providing street-involved people with a place to have a shower, do laundry and get employment help. The people we spoke with described how they walk from as far as Bloor and Parliament to access the program, how the room it is hosted in smells like disinfectant. They told us that people come for the coffee and the company as much as the food. Whidden and I were drawn to these 'grounded' conversations. Here were the reasons *why* particular services in the city matter, as well as details regarding how they matter differently to different people and how they might be improved.

Our early experiences conducting site-specific memory collection led the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY toward a different approach to site-

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specificity and social engagement than we had originally intended. Here, rather than presenting general concerns for public infrastructure, people were sharing their personal relationships with particular sites. This moved Whidden and me away from an artistic approach that would draw on the cityscape as an illustrative backdrop through which to activate an (unspecified) audience around the issue of service cuts. Instead, we began to create a place-based project, in which we feel compelled to represent each site in its particularities, to simultaneously convey the 'spirit' of each place and to indicate the diverse ways in which it acts as a lifeline for different people. Our obligation to make our commemorative signs well (to make them accurate both emotionally and factually) has deepened immeasurably through our site-specific public conversations.

The DEPARTMENT's sense of obligation to represent each site in its particularities only increases at sites where we are explicitly invited to make a commemorative sign and where we therefore form long-term relationships. At some of these sites, our engagement with individuals has been much more extensive than the relatively brief memory collections we usually do. For example, as will discuss below, we gathered lengthy oral histories from ex-staff of Perram House, a residential hospice that we commemorated in 2013. Here, 'memory collection' truly felt like a form of bearing witness. Nurses told us about their working conditions at the site, the rewards and profound challenges of caring for people in their final weeks of life, the moral dilemmas involved in palliative care. We bore witness to both their grief and their anger about the closure of Perram House. Comparable intensity has existed at other sites as well,

particularly at a meal program that was slated to close, a health program that lost its funding and a daycare that recently closed. It is not unusual for individuals to cry as they speak with us. We think there are a few reasons for this. First, by researching service closures we are tapping into profound social trauma, which is experienced both individually and collectively. Second, the kinds of questions we ask tap into the emotional realm (questions about sounds and smells, for example). A deepened sense of obligation to bear witness to these service closures has moved the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY from an agit-prop intervention to a slower, more locally engaged project.

It is worth mentioning here, though, that even at sites we have not been invited to, we are amazed by the immediate intimacy of our one-on-one interactions, despite all of the factors one might think would prevent intimacy. Here we are approaching strangers in public spaces, wearing strange uniforms and introducing ourselves as a "department." And yet our experience has been that people seem to want to talk. Certainly, about half the people we approach (more in some sites) decline to speak with us (we thank them anyway and offer them a business card), but our experience conducting "memory collection" with those who do decide to stop and speak with us has been very positive, with a surprising degree of reciprocity. We are often thanked for the conversation at the end of a 'memory collection.' Is this because Torontonians are hungry for civic conversation? It is because we undercut our performed officialdom with both personal sincerity and clownish hints at the fiction we are enacting? Does our own vulnerability in our uniforms compel people to speak with us- perhaps out of

compassion or even pity? Is it, more cynically, because we are women lending a

sympathetic ear? While we developed this element of our performance out of a

practical need for knowledge, we have found that this process expands the

repertoire of street performance by creating a space for focused and intimate

conversation in public space. While our performances during 'memory collection

duty' begin as spectacle they quickly become engaged interactions. Over two

years into this project Whidden and I still experience anxiety before beginning

memory collection at each new site (what *are* we doing? how will people react?)

but our experiences have been largely positive. This is interesting and

encouraging to us because, unlike many artistic processes in which there is

subtle coercion of participants (who gain school credits or curry favour with an

organization they rely on by participating) participation in our project is on the

voluntary end of the spectrum.[768]

Three years after starting DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY,

Whidden and I have engaged in public conversation with hundreds of people at

over a dozen sites. We have spoken with people about: St. Stephens Community

House Corner Drop-In program, The Friendship Centre, the Bloor/Gladstone

Library, the Dufferin Bus, the Urban Affairs Library, Toronto Reference Library,

the Scarborough Rocket, Perram House, Harm Reduction programs at Queen

West Community Health Centre, Harm Reduction programs at Parkdale

Community Health Centre, Warden Woods' Food Security programs, Bellevue

Child Care Centre, Seaton House, the Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource

Centre and more. I will further discuss the nature of social engagement in these

conversations after I describe our artistic process at each site in full. We first carried through our entire methodology at the Ralph Thornton Centre, a community centre in the south Riverdale neighbourhood.

In the Workplace: Our Partnership with the Ralph Thornton Centre
In the spring of 2012 a board member from the Ralph Thornton Community Centre (RTC) contacted the DEPARTMENT asking for our help commemorating their computer resource centre, which was closing due to the loss of a longtime provincial grant. While we still had no funds for our project, Whidden and I jumped at the opportunity to work with the RTC anyway. Our goal had been to provide a form of service ourselves, to make the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY a socially useful and valued department. This was the first time we had been *asked* to provide our services and, in light of the trouble we had experienced locating actual sites of service closures we were keen to help. No doubt it also felt good to meet service providers (themselves under extreme time and financial pressures) who perceived art as socially valuable and intuitively 'got' the project. That they were willing to spend the time attending to the emotional repercussions of service loss even while they were very busy attending to keeping the centre running and that they wanted to do so in collaboration with artists delighted us. Of course, this would turn out to be a reciprocal partnership, through which we would come to better understand our own project and its potential as a form of social engagement. We worked (unpaid) with the RTC over a period of six weeks to make a commemorative sign

for the Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre (LPCRC) and installed it at a large community event on June 28, 2012. I will describe our artistic process at the RTC in full, as it has become a template for our work with other sites.

At our first meeting with RTC board members and management they told us that they intended to hold some kind of "wake" for their computer resource centre in late June, as the centre would be closing in early July. There were two different reasons why they wanted to work with us. While some people in the meeting wanted especially to raise political awareness in the neighbourhood about loss of funding (and to build advocacy for the RTC), other members of the RTC management team stressed the importance of mourning the loss of the resource centre and hoped that our work would provide a form of emotional release for the community affiliated with the centre. We outlined our artistic process, showing them our memory collection questions and ensuring that they would introduce us to people at the centre, make time to share their own memories with us, help round up images and documents regarding the centre's fifteen year history and, allow us to install the commemorative sign we would make. Everyone in the meeting agreed that printing a draft of the sign and circulating it at the centre to ensure that it met with approval from clients at the centre was crucial, despite the tight deadline. The sign would be unveiled at the 'wake' for the centre, which we would co-organize. Whidden and I suggested that some of the memories that did not make it in full on to the sign could be read aloud at that event as well. We had six weeks, then, to collect lived memories, produce a commemorative sign, show it at the centre and either secure approval

for it or make changes, print the sign and plan for the 'wake' at which we would unveil it.

We began our process at the RTC with a number of memory collection visits (in uniform, with garbage can and maintenance supplies in tow, conducting ourselves as civic workers). The centre staff introduced us to service users as, "the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY- artists who will be making a sign to honour the computer resource centre." This reduced the onus on us to undercut our performance with unusual behaviour. It was already understood that we were a fictional department. During one-on-one memory collection, staff and clients told us in specific ways about how accommodating the centre was to difference and how it had grown over its fifteen years to suit clients. While this was officially an employment centre (the bulk of its funding had been from Employment Ontario, who were cutting funds because they were starting a new multi-service model), the centre functioned also as a 'home office' for many people, as a place to access computers for homework or to communicate with family by email, as a place to gain computer literacy, somewhere to get help with taxes, to get help applying for school, to use the phone, to print documents. People we spoke with emphasized the trustworthiness of the staff, their personal touch and the extended evening hours. Some people we spoke with had been using the centre for years, others only for a few weeks. Not everyone knew each other. Some people would greet each other as they arrived and many knew the staff. Memory collection with the staff gave us a detailed sense of the history of the centre and some of the philosophy behind it, a grassroots philosophy in which the centre

operated in accordance with the desires of clients (providing free printing, a phone, etcetera). Our conversations with both service users and staff made us aware of deep community attachment to the centre. Perhaps one individual's comment summed up this sentiment: 'The other [employment] centres, everything was new, the tables, the door. But there was no soul. I could never find a job there.'[769]

The DEPARTMENT then hosted a workshop in which people could read each other's memories (as transcribed by us), look at old photographs of the centre and identify the material they thought was most important for the sign. We had already experimented with facilitating this shift from one-on-one memory sharing to collective dialogue at *The Rhubarb Festival* and *The Mayworks Festival.* At these festivals, we led groups of strangers through a series of working questions, including: *Which material is most compelling? What speaks to you? What will stand out in contrast to other visual information in the cityscape?* By the end of these two-hour workshops each participant had produced an individual template for a sign and each workshop group had produced a collective template. At the RTC, we did not manage to facilitate a group conversation as individuals dropped into the workshop one by one. We did, however, have a chance to review all of the material gathered with a few individuals and to brainstorm ideas with these people.

Whidden and I then took all the material we had gathered and designed our first sign. We had already agreed our signs would be a form of counter-monument and that they would be both text-based and image-based. We wanted

to present subjective fragments of the site's history, hinting at a larger story but avoiding the general summaries typical of historical plaques. We had also played with a kind of 'ghosting' technique in Adobe Illustrator (the program we use to design our signs), in which we blur the edges of an image to make it ghostlike, evoking a sense of absence. Beyond these aesthetic choices, the particularities of the memories we had collected guided our process. We wanted both the tenor of the sign and its content to reflect the conversations we'd had. Our final design showed a "ghosted" image of a resource centre user at a computer, with seven job titles listed: Carpenter, Cabinet Maker, Nurse, Chemist, Musician, Architect, Cook. These were all jobs people we spoke with had found with the help of staff at the centre. Two of these were written in Mandarin, as there is large Chinese population in the area and Mandarin is one of the key languages spoken at the centre. The other side of the sign was drafted to replicate a cover letter for a job application. Through this device we were able to again reference the fact that the resource centre was an employment centre but also to specify all of the different ways in which it had served individuals we spoke with. To see both sides of our commemorative sign for the Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre see appendices.

Finally, after posting a draft of the sign in the RTC for feedback from service staff and service users, we printed and installed the sign on the exterior of the RTC, just in advance of the June 28 'wake' for the centre that we had co-organized with the RTC board. Below the covered sign we set up a small stage with a microphone. A ladder by which to reach the sign stood beside the stage.

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With these trappings of officialdom we hoped to evoke an official ribbon-cutting ceremony or a heritage sign unveiling.

The event on June 28 was well attended and emotional. The RTC is a longtime and well-connected community centre and the event drew a crowd of over 100 people. The federal, provincial and municipal elected representatives for the area (all members of the 'opposition') attended and spoke at the event, which was held at the Ralph Thornton Centre. After a number of speeches about the history of the centre and some fiery speeches about the politics of cuts to public services, members of the audience stood up and read short (anonymous) excerpts from the memory collections Whidden and I had done. Whidden and I introduced the DEPARTMENT and invited the crowd outside for the sign unveiling. On our stage in front of the building the RTC's executive director spoke about the importance of fighting cuts to services. We stood on either side of the stage deferentially, our hands behind our backs. Eventually I spoke on the microphone and announced the unveiling of our commemorative sign as Whidden climbed the ladder to remove the dark cloth covering it. As she pulled the cloth away cameras clicked and there was a spattering of applause. After unveiling the sign we asked one of the staff from the RTC to read the sign text aloud to the audience. Finally, we asked each person in the crowd to lay a white daisy at the base of the sign, as an act of mourning for the computer resource centre.

Since this public sign unveiling at the RTC, Whidden and I have incorporated live sign unveiling ceremonies into our artistic process wherever

possible. We were inspired to do this for two reasons. First, we found the affective resonance of coming together to collectively share memories of the centre and to speak about the bigger picture of funding cuts remarkable. This allowed for the broader spatial imagination we wanted to maintain in the project. It was both personal and particular to the site and tied into a broader web of politics. Many people told us after the fact that the live memory sharing had been the most moving part of the event (despite the many other speeches). We now always incorporate both live memory sharing (which addresses the particularities of the site at hand) and a talk about the bigger picture of funding cuts and struggles to maintain public sites and services (either delivered by one of us or by one of our invited speakers).

The second remarkable facet of the June 28 event was the extent to which the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY's mission to commemorate sites of service loss gained legitimacy through it. As the crowd mingled after we unveiled our sign, all of the politicians in attendance jumped at the chance of a photo op with Whidden and me on stage under the sign, as they would for the unveiling of a state-sanctioned heritage plaque or at an official ribbon cutting. By assuming the role of the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY, we had officially *become* it. Here we had installed a permanent sign commemorating a public service closure and garnered public recognition of this closure. This new level of legitimacy for the project was intriguing to us, both for its irony (as I will discuss shortly, we are always undercutting our authority as a DEPARTMENT, illuminating the *impossibility* of our stated goals) and in that it showed us that we

could continue to direct public attention toward the histories of public services in the city.

The final stage of our partnership with the RTC has been a prolonged reciprocal relationship. We have returned to the RTC twice since the unveiling of our sign- once for the RTC's AGM, at which we presented some framed photographs of the unveiling event as a gift to the centre, and again on the one-year anniversary of our unveiling, at which we did some sign maintenance, cleaning the sign and the area outside the building. The RTC board and management have, in the meantime, recommended our 'services' to other service providers, written a letter of recommendation for a grant and helped us brainstorm our future work as the DEPARTMENT.

Since our partnership with the RTC, we have considered all stages of the artistic process I have just described important to fostering public dialogue. From memory collection to our design workshops, from sign-making through to a physical gathering to unveil the sign and a continued relationship with the site after the fact, we see this process as a way to move through personal acts of recollection and then take the dialogue to a collective realm- to considerations of our common good. While the initial one-on-one conversations are between DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY workers (performers) and the audience we encounter, they quickly expand beyond us. Our workshops and installation ceremonies encourage civic conversation between strangers in a group setting. At our live events, our presence as a DEPARTMENT recedes into the background and the conversation become between participants (both between

those who have had their own intimate experiences with the site and between

people who have arrived to take part in an 'art event'). We hope that our signs

themselves and the photographs that document their presence at each site will

act as catalysts for further civic dialogue between strangers. In all steps of our

process we strive to create a space for situated conversations in public space;

conversations that start with the personal but address the political fate of the city.

Through these multiple stages of our process, we build multiple layers of

audience, including: service staff and service users at each site; people who

participate in the design workshops and attend the installation ceremonies (these

are service users and staff too but also consist of people who have been

exposed to our work through festivals, presentations, our website and other

publicity) and, members of the public who happen upon our signs and

performances as they move through a neighbourhood. Eventually, we imagine

that another audience will be the people who attend a gallery exhibition of this

work (we always print double copies of our signs and would like to show them as

a set). Some of our audience is "accidental"[770] in the sense that they happen

upon the work. But for the most part our audience is far from random. Because

we perform at the sites we are investigating, our audiences are largely familiar

with the service, augmenting their experience of the event.

The Affective Potential of Site-Specificity: Grieving for a Place that Worked
As my description of our artistic process with the RTC shows, the DEPARTMENT

is no longer just focused on illuminating reductions in the city's infrastructure

(creating a sense of 'the wrong place'[771]) but rather brings people together to consider the meaning of specific local sites in their lives and to dialogue publicly about both the past and the future of these sites. It has become a much more localized project than we had initially imagined, so much so that we struggle to hold onto the broader spatial imagination at work in the project (as I will discuss shortly). Since our work with the RTC, Whidden and I have made signs for six other sites and have carried out our full artistic process (with all of the steps outlined in my description of our work with the RTC) with four other sites, including Perram House. Perram House was a residential palliative care hospice in downtown Toronto. It closed suddenly in April 2013 due to a financial crisis (the hospice did not have enough operating funds to remain open). Over the summer of 2013 the DEPARTMENT researched the history of Perram House, conducting extended 'memory collection' with a number of nurses who had worked at the hospice, one board member, some of the management team and one volunteer care-giver. Our work with Perram House was a rich experience, from which there are many lessons to be learned. Here I want to focus on what our experiences working with both Perram House and the RTC reveal about the affective potential of site-specific work.

Perram House was an eight-bed residential palliative care hospice that specifically focused on providing end-of-life care for Toronto's homeless and marginalized residents. It worked from a model of non-judgmental compassion, bringing a harm reduction approach together with a palliative care approach. As most hospices in Ontario do, Perram House operated primarily thanks to public

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funds (provincial health funding, distributed through a 'Local Integrated Health Network') but also relied on private donations. It was open from 2005-2013.

When Perram House closed in April 2013, relations between its workers, volunteers and board of directors were very bitter. Earlier that year, Perram House staff had unionized with the Ontario Public Sector Employees Union, asking for improved wages and working conditions. Nurses and Personal Support Workers at Perram House felt overburdened by ever-increasing workloads. Because the hospice had been struggling financially, other forms of support for the medical team had dwindled and nurses were now expected to contribute to other tasks such as cooking, laundry and building maintenance. Some had not received a pay increase in the entire life of the hospice and all of them were paid significantly less than they would make in a hospital setting.[772] This, along with the demands of the job (end-of-life care in which the desires of patients are met whenever possible) had led to a fragile workplace in which staff were working well beyond the 'call of duty' to provide their patients with good care. In the meantime, the Perram House board of directors had been struggling with diminishing private donations and was angry that staff had unionized. In their opinion staff were asking more than they should have, given they worked in a hospice setting and were jeopardizing an organization that just couldn't afford to pay more. In the final weeks before Perram House closed, staff were asked to accept a temporary paycut to keep the Hospice open. The hospice's Board of Directors appealed to all levels of government for more money but were refused. Staff learned that the hospice would close only three days before it did and the

patients who were currently in care were sent to palliative care units in nearby hospitals. A nasty public relations battle followed, garnering some press coverage. Perram House had been one of only three residential hospices in all of Toronto. Each side blamed the other for the closure.

Whidden and I first contacted nurses from Perram House only a few weeks after it had closed. We were interested in making a sign for what sounded like it had been a valuable public service. Would they talk to us? The nurse who had worked at Perram House the longest (since it opened) agreed to meet with us because she liked the sound of our project and thought that the closure of the hospice needed to be grieved. She and the others were tired, she said, of the nasty politicking in the media and were not interested in more of that approach to the closure.[773]

What followed was a two-hour memory collection (this time with both Whidden and I present, rather than one-on-one) in which we learned about the philosophy of palliative care, the daily functioning of Perram House, the social mix of clientele who ended up there (from retired judges to people just released from jail so that they could access palliative care), the beauty of the heritage building in which Perram House operated and how that contributed to the quality of care. We had developed an extra set of questions for our memory collection, so as to learn more specific details about the hospice. We did not think we would have an opportunity to meet with many of the staff, as the hospice was closed and we did not have a large contact list. By the end of our meeting, however, the nurse we had spoken with was so moved by the process of speaking with us that

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she offered to recommend us to others she had worked with. A commemorative sign and a chance to collectively grieve the closure was exactly what they needed, she affirmed. Thus began our collaboration with Perram House staff. Over the summer of 2013 we gathered memories from a number of ex-caregivers from the hospice (sometimes in person, sometimes by phone, sometimes individually, once in a pair). We also began a communication with the Perram House Board and managed to meet with one of the members.

Each person we spoke with had been deeply moved by her/his experience working with or at Perram House. People told us about how residents would ease into being cared for and begin to feel safe at Perram House, about difficult residents and the lengths hospice staff would go to to please them even as they were rude or unpleasant. They told us about the kinds of foods people like to eat in the dying process and about the "community that was built in the [Perram House] kitchen", which was "the hub of the hospice."[774] They also described the architectural details of the building- the height of the baseboards, the "sweeping staircase", the ornate plaster work and the stained glass, all of which, it seems contributed to the sense of care and comfort at Perram House. We also learned about what makes palliative care work challenging and about why residential hospice care is the only option for many people (as opposed to dying at home or in a hospital). What was interesting about our memory collections with people on both 'sides of the fence' in what had been a very conflictual closure was that they saw the same value in the hospice, even as they had occupied very different

positions while there and had conflicting perspectives on why it closed. As one nurse put it: "the philosophy of care was united."[775]

Because nurses and support workers do shift work, we were never able to gather a group of ex-staff from Perram House together to consult on our commemorative sign design or to look through the "memory archive" we had created for the hospice. Instead, Whidden and I worked with all of the material we had gathered (memory collections and web research) and then sent out drafts of the sign by email, asking for comments. It was very important to us that we 'got it right.' We wanted to honour the philosophy of care and (as we had with the RTC) as well as the specificities of Perram House that embodied that philosophy. We also wanted to be sure we used the terminology Perram House workers had used (referring to "residents" rather than "patients", for example). The sign we made for Perram House featured a rippled white bed sheet hanging down from the corner of a bed, with blurred edges in the "ghosting" technique we developed for our first sign (see appendices for a photograph of the sign). Above the image was a definition for hospice that acknowledged the many iterations of the building's life, including its early years as a home for immigrant women and the fact that the hospice particularly welcomed people who had been "living rough". It read: "hos·pice/ a house of shelter for the poor, sick and dying. [from Latin *hospitium*, hospitality]". The other side of the sign was written as a kind of elegy to Perram House, bringing in the details of what went on in the building and what made it a remarkable place. Behind the text was a close-up detail of the ornate plaster work in Perram House. We received very positive feedback from most of

the people who had shared their memories with us and also made a small revision to the text upon their suggestion.

The people we were unable, ultimately, to bring into the collaborative process of remembering Perram House were the hospice's board of directors. While we tried many times to get in touch with the board (particularly the head of the board, who founded the hospice), for the most part board members refused to speak with us. One board member did meet with us, sharing her memories and, in fact, weeping at the loss of the hospice as she did so. She expressed concern that our sign would blame the board for the closure and told us how hurt and angry she and the chair of the board were about both the staff's unionization and their critical comments in the press after Perram House closed. We assured her that, while our project would not skirt away from the reasons why the hospice closed, our intention was to honour the labour that had gone into running Perram House and to emphasize its value as a public asset in the city. While this board member was both friendly and very generous with her time and memories in our face-to-face meeting (the meeting ended well), she became antagonistic over email after relaying our project to the ex-chair of the board (who founded Perram House and also owned the building in which it operated). Through her, the chair sent veiled threats to sue the DEPARTMENT and made it clear that we were not to set foot on the property. We continued to try to communicate diplomatically and even empathetically with the board but were unable to convince them to comment on our final sign draft or to attend the unveiling (though we offered them a chance to speak at the event). The one board member we did have email

contact with (who seemed to act as a spokesperson for the chair) could not countenance that we saw this as a public matter and continued to emphasize that Perram House had been a private organization. Whidden and I struggled significantly with the question of whether we were wrong to consider Perram House a public asset. We questioned our decision to work with Perram House at all. In the end, though, after much deliberation, we came to the conclusion that since it was experienced by the communities who accessed it as a public resource (as an option in the healthcare system) and since it was very largely publicly funded (by the province), it was still within our project's purview. The closure of Perram House was experienced as a service loss for the many healthcare providers who referred marginalized clients to it.

After much organizing and publicity, the DEPARTMENT hosted a sign unveiling in front of Perram House in early October, 2013. As we had at the RTC, we set up a small stage on the sidewalk and covered our sign (this time mounted on a street pole rather than the building) with a black cloth. Perram House stood directly behind the sign and our stage. We had simple props- a ladder, a small battery-operated sound system, a folding table on which we placed a rectangular white-frosted cake and a bucket of white flowers which audience members could place at the base of the sign after the unveiling. Again, we were trying to aesthetically replicate an 'official' sign unveiling (replete with heavily frosted cake, etc.), though we in fact had no permit to host our event on the street nor any goodwill from the property owner. We were very careful to dissuade audience members from setting foot on private property.

As at the RTC sign unveiling, live memories were shared at this unveiling too, though this time they were not snippets from what we had gathered but instead short eulogies from five caregivers who had worked at Perram House. We had spoken at length with each of these people in advance and curated their eulogies so that in combination they would speak to all aspects of the hospice- daily life in a hospice, the philosophy of palliative care, social relationships at Perram house and the physical features of the building. We wanted our audience who had never set foot in Perram House to be able to picture what it had been like while it was operating. Importantly, we asked our final speaker (an ex- manager at Perram House) to talk about funding for hospice and to link the story of Perram House to the bigger political picture of public funding and to her hopes for the future of hospice. We were sure to include staff, a volunteer and a past member of the management in our list of speakers. We would have liked to hear from a board member but had not been able to convince any to attend. We began by framing the story of Perram House ourselves. I gave my own sort of eulogy, in which I spoke about the different perspectives on why it had closed, the ways in which it was valued by those who knew it, and the questions its closure posed for the future of social life in the city. We also handed out a program (designed much like a program for an individual's funeral), which sketched a short history of Perram House and included a number of short excerpts from the memories we had gathered.

Like the sign unveiling at the RTC, the Perram House commemorative sign unveiling was well attended. We had been sure to invite a wide range of

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organizations and individuals who had interfaced with Perram House, including hospice palliative care advocacy networks, directors and staff of other hospices, OPSEU (the union that represented Perram House workers), the local funeral home, and political representatives for the area. Our own networks of people also came, including a number of people who follow the DEPARTMENT on social media but do not know us personally. There was also a contingent of people who had worked at Perram House but never spoken with us before (presumably invited by the nurses we had already worked with). None of the political representatives we had invited attended. Hospice advocates and a contact at OPSEU both suggested that the politicians stayed away because the issue of funding for hospice care is complex (hospices are both publicly and privately funded) and because the particular story of Perram House was rife with personal conflict and 'hot-potato' political issues, like unionization.

From what Whidden and I could tell, the Perram House sign unveiling was a moving and stimulating experience for the people who attended. Certainly, the crowd seemed riveted while our invited speakers shared their memories of the hospice. I was amazed to look out from my position beside the stage to see tears on many faces in the crowd as what felt more and more like a funereal ceremony progressed. We were pleased that the crowd mingled, speaking with each other after the sign was unveiled and eating the cake we offered them. Perram House was on a small residential street and as the crowd grew it took up most of the road, moving once in a while to let a car go by. All the while Perram House itself, a large Gothic Revival heritage building (originally built as a family home), stood

in the background. There was a lockbox on the front door and from the street it appeared that the building stood empty. People would gesture toward it as they spoke, both during the curated memory sharing and during casual conversation after (for images of the event see appendices).

What was also interesting about the event is that our speakers represented a range of perspectives on the future of hospice care. While they all spoke passionately about the work they had done at Perram House and about the need for non-judgmental hospices particularly in which street-involved people can feel comfortable and cared for they had divergent opinions as to how hospice should be funded. Our final speaker surprised the audience by suggesting that hospice should *not* be fully publicly funded but rather heavily publicly supported with some autonomy from public healthcare. Had we managed to entice members of the Perram House board to the event we might have heard more about funding and the challenges of operating a hospice from a financial perspective.

After the event Perram house staff we had worked with thanked us profusely for offering them a chance to collectively grieve the closure of the hospice. One of the nurses wrote: "Thank you for your hard work, your thoughtfulness, and your beautiful rendering of our memories in the sign you created! Words cannot express how much we appreciate everything you've done to help people remember the important work we did and the communities that we served."[776] An ex-manager of the hospice, who had initially been skeptical about

our desire to hold the complexity of the story together, telling me: "you may be interested in the many stories but there is *one* true story" (I never figured out what that one true story was), thanked us for the "sweetness" the event had brought to her life.[777] So too did people who had not known Perram House personally seem moved. Comments we received by email included:

> it was amazing to be there. i was so touched and impressed by your methods, the research, the respectful and thoughtful presentation. i loved the ritualization, the performance intersecting the real, the mobilization of city infrastructures (like lamp posts and road signs) in service of people and community, in service of memory and commemoration, in service of relationships.[778]

Others told us verbally that they could imagine the inside of the building now and felt as though they knew the site personally.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, there are no doubt critiques of our project that I am unaware of and I cannot claim to know the range of responses any facet of our work has elicited. In the case of the Perram House sign unveiling, it seems likely that the intensity of emotion the event brought forth was partially a result of the fact that this was a site where people went to die. Death and dying are so rarely spoken about in public, and conversations about them immediately become personal as individuals recall their own experiences with family members and loved ones. This is also a life experience that cuts across class, meaning that even if audience members did not empathize with the Perram House caregivers or their descriptions of past residents of the hospice, they were likely to feel unease and strong emotions as they imagined their own

inevitable dying process. As I have also already noted, though, we have been consistently amazed by the deeply personal nature of this very public project at sites *beyond* Perram House. Even as we knew when we began this project that public services were sites of deep personal significance and intense human relationships we have been surprised by the depth of emotion this project elicits.

I suspect that the emotional impact of this work is largely a result of our choice to work site-specifically and to draw on personal narratives. Site-specificity clearly has affective potential. By drawing out the particularities of place through personal narrative this project brings sites into focus that would otherwise remain invisible to all but those who access them personally. This project considers the city not from a detached perspective but from a subjective standpoint. By standing on the street, bearing witness to the site, audience members become more than spectators.[779] All of their senses are engaged. I think that through the Perram House sign unveiling event our audience felt implicated or at least involved in the closure of the service. I hope that a feeling of implication increased as they listened to the testimonies of the caregivers who had worked at Perram House, read the sign and laid flowers at its base. I will discuss the extent to which I think we have succeeded in creating a 'dilemmatic space' in our work shortly. I do think that our events succeed (perhaps temporarily) in making people feel something for sites they previously did know and for strangers in the city.

The DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY
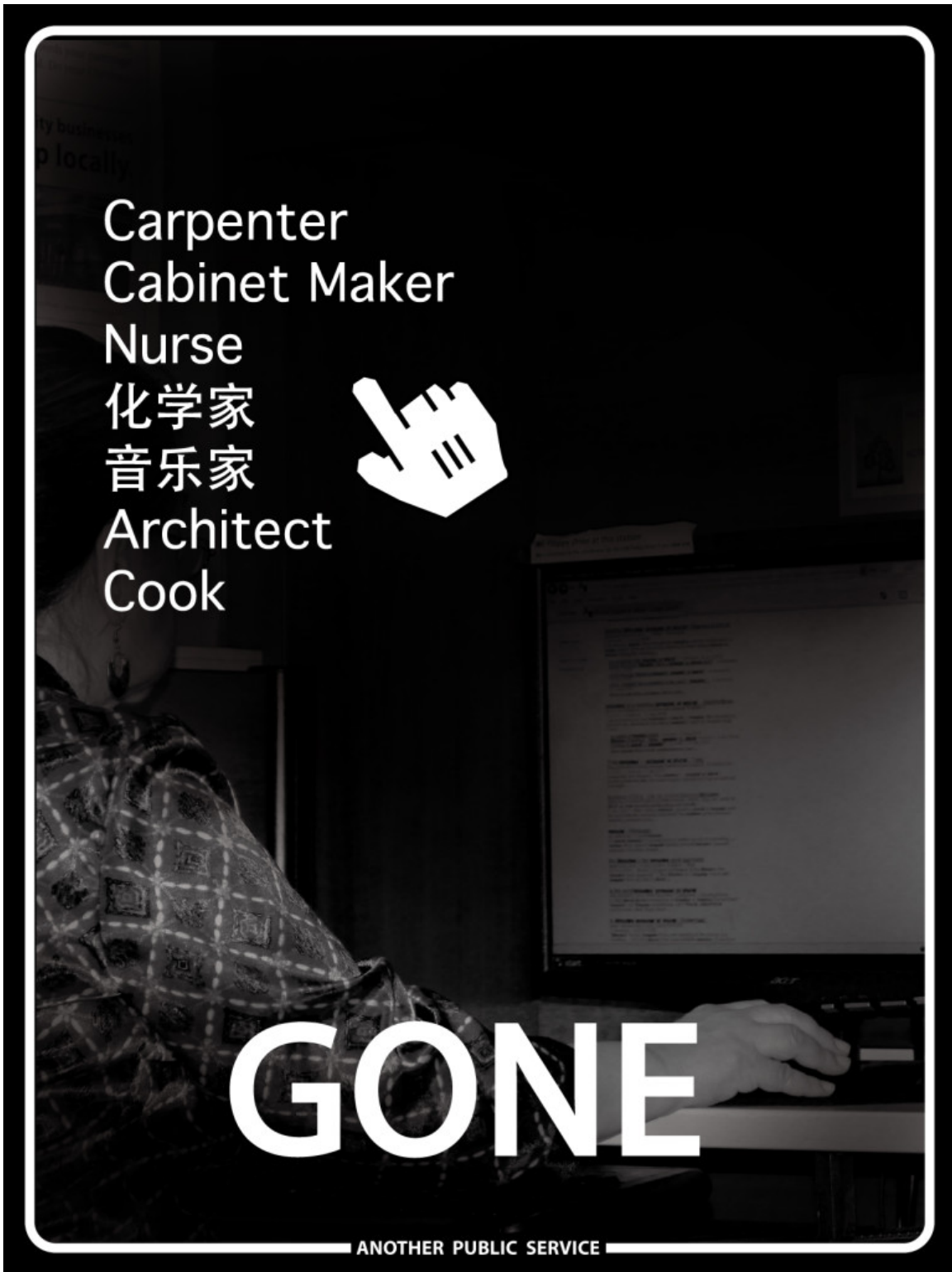
Memory Collection Duty.

DEPARTMENT Garbage Can and Rag.

Sign

Sign Unveiling at Parkdale Community Health Centre.

Sign Front for Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre.

Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre
3rd Floor Ralph Thornton Centre
South Riverdale, Toronto
1997 - 2012

Re: JOB POSTING #----

To Whom It May Concern:

I am applying for the position of Essential Community Service. For fifteen years I have been a place where people could look for jobs, housing and training programs. I've sent people to George Brown College, Miziwe Biik and British Columbia.

I have helped people with faxes, downloads, printouts photocopies and phone calls. I've held babies on my lap while their moms looked for work. People come to me to fill out forms, learn about email, scan ID, conduct their business. I used to provide E.S.L. classes.

I am quiet and calm. I am open until 8 pm. I provide volunteer opportunities. I help people write resumés. I greet people well every time they come here.

I will be missed.

Thank you for your consideration,

The Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre

Sign Back for Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre.

Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre Sign Installed.

hos·pice
a house of shelter or rest for pilgrims,
travellers and the poor, sick and dying.
[From Latin *hospitium,* hospitality]

GONE

ANOTHER PUBLIC SERVICE

Sign Front for Perram House.

Through the night shift
and into morning
Perram House creaks and groans.

It doesn't care who you are or where you came from.
Blue. Yellow. Pale purple.
Each room is different.

An all-male choir sings Leonard Cohen's
Hallelujah in the Living Room.
A resident reads on the back deck.

Nurses, support workers, volunteers learn
the art of working slow enough and quick enough.
Making pancakes. Treating pain.

Up and down the Scarlett O'Hara staircase
and through bevelled glass doors they
Turn. Bathe. Brush hair. Ease.

More ice.
Lipstick.
Someone wants to go out for a smoke.

Three days. A month. A week.
We all knew how rare this was.

A dying wish

Sign Back for Perram House.

Speaker at Perram House Sign Unveiling.

Audience at Perram House Sign Unveiling.

Sign Front for Bellevue Child Care Centre.

If wishes were horses then beggars would ride.
They'd bundle us up and take us outside.

And back in again for cod liver oil
playtime and naptime with blankets of flannel.

Then stories and
songs and fun
finger games.

We went out
in the cold
but never the rain.

Towels on hooks
face cloths
on the rail.

Mothers go marching through brimstone and hail.

From the plant, from the lab, they go to petition
for government funds
for our safe supervision.

To Queen's Park, to Council, straight on to the Feds.
Then home again quickly to put us to bed.

departmentofpublicmemory.com

Sign Back for Bellevue Child Care Centre.

Parkdale Community Health Centre Sign Installed.
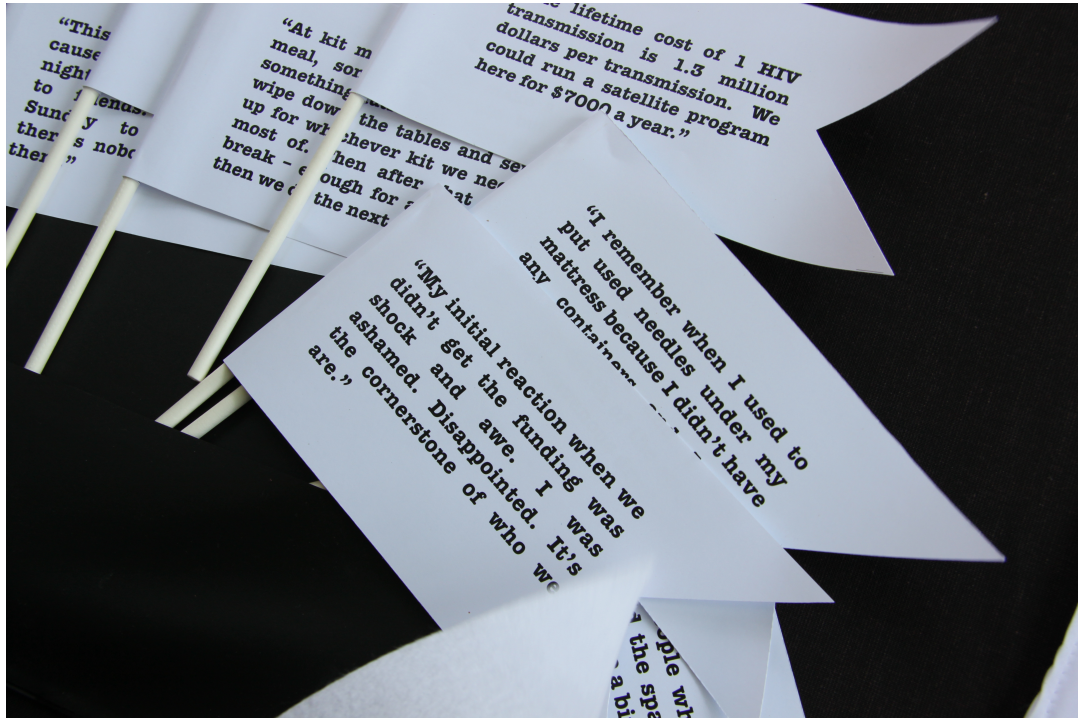
Memory Flags at Parkdale Community Health Centre Sign Unveiling.

Flowers Laid by Audience Members at the Ralph Thornton Centre.

Geographer Karen Till has coined the term "wounded places" to describe places that are "present to the pain of others" and that "embody difficult social pasts."[780] Till describes artistic and activist memory work as a form of care for wounded places and suggests that wounded places can be crucial resources through which to mourn loss, both individually and collectively.[781] The concept of "wounded places" is apt for the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY's work. In a sense we are creating counter-monuments through our site-specific work. The job of the counter-monument, it seems, is to keep a social wound open rather than let it heal superficially. As I discusses in my chapter on REPOhistory, memory scholar James Young has argued that the best memorial is "not a single memorial at all- but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of

memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end."[782] Counter-monuments assert that it is a political act to remember and, equally, a political act to forget.

This project, though, also incorporates live dialogue and site-specific performance, which are not features of the counter-monuments Young has written about. Site-specific performance is powerful in that it can re-open our mental associations with places and can also alter practices of place, marking specific sites as mutable and open to various possible futures.[783] Site-specific performance not only marks sites as vulnerable and open to change but so too can it make audiences feel vulnerable.[784] The audience takes a risk, by participating in a live event in public space. At the Perram House sign unveiling anything could have happened while we stood on the street (in the 'wrong place'?) sharing in deliberation about the past and possible future of a common asset. The event was unpredictable both because it was in public space and invited a public audience and because the performance itself contested the rules of conventional behaviour in such spaces. As our performance and 'everyday life' intersected there was an increased sense of risk and urgency. What would happen at this quasi-official event on the street? Perhaps the affective response to the vulnerability of public performance was amplified for Whidden and me, as hosts of the event. Again, given the heterogeneity of any audience, it is impossible to determine or fully evaluate individual responses to these events.

While it is impossible to anticipate or know the varied responses of individuals to site-specific performance (particularly because they bring their own

relationships to a site with them),[785] for the purposes of this project it does seem that site-specific performance has the potential to reignite a sense amongst participants (Whidden and I included) that public service sites are open to public determination. Performance theorist Gay McGauley argues that site-specific performance can highlight tensions between legal ownership and 'moral ownership' of a site.[786] My experience of the Perram House sign unveiling was simultaneously one of unease and one of reclamation of 'moral ownership' of the site. We were standing in the 'wrong place' in a legal sense and we were exposing the 'wrong place' as theorized by Kwon, in that we were creating a sense of unease about the trajectory of the city. But there was also a powerful sense of communication and socially valuable exchange in the event. Was this, then, an example of dilemmatic space? Were we pulling off a combination of celebration and conflict? Were we stretching participants senses of responsibility to one another, even as we engaged them in a conflictual story? As tricky as it had been to create this moment well (and even as we were aware of the people who were not participating in the event) the Perram House sign unveiling felt like a moment where we were successfully managing the artistry of dialogical art.

I have described here some of the affective potential of site-specific dialogical work. Our work with Perram House however, was also indicative of a key challenge in site-specific social engagement, which is the inevitability of local antagonisms. This a challenge that, as I suggested in Chapter Four, is sometimes left out of the recent literature on social practice.

Challenges in Site-Specificity: Local Antagonisms and the 'Extra-Local'

Even as I have just described the affective potential of the methodology Whidden and I have developed for the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY, there are significant challenges to working site-specifically and dialogically in the way that we want to. First, I am ever aware in this project of the different relationships individuals have with public service sites and of how power relations flow through them. This is the power-geometry of place that Massey's work highlights.[787] While it is one thing to write about engaging the public, we know that there is not one homogenous public.[788] I discussed the perils and challenges of a philosophy of social inclusion without an eye to power in Chapter Five. Here I want to describe some of the challenges the DEPARTMENT has faced attempting to foster 'public' engagement at different sites in Toronto. Ultimately, we have had to identify which publics we are aligning ourselves with, even as we attempt to foster dialogue across different perspectives. We have been reminded throughout this project of how very privatized so-called 'public' sites in the city really are and have confronted the myth of the 'public sphere' at every step along the way.

I described the DEPARTMENT's 2011 'memory collection' performance at the Urban Affairs Library in my preface to this chapter. This was our first attempt at public memory collection and, while it resulted in some interesting conversations with library users, it also ended with Whidden and I being escorted out of the building by a security guard. We were told that we could not engage in

conversation with strangers in a city-owned space like Metro Hall without permission. We were just developing our project and figuring out our approach to public engagement so didn't question the guard's authority and left obediently. We have since had similar experiences at a number of public sites. While we have decided never to visit a program that specifically serves marginalized populations without an invitation (e.g. a meal program or shelter) we have visited sites like libraries, bus stops and parks without seeking permission or an invitation. At all city-owned buildings we have visited we have been told that we must stand on the sidewalk rather than the city-owned property (unless we have been invited). Even as many service-users at these sites have been happy to engage with us we have quickly been informed that these are *not* sites for unsanctioned public dialogue.

Similarly, we have sometimes been invited by front-line staff to a social service site (a community program, for example) only to later be told by management that the optics of participating in our project would not be good for the organization. I have already described the antagonism of the Perram House Board of directors toward our project but this has in fact happened elsewhere, albeit with a much less antagonistic tone. While front-line staff and many service users want to discuss the ways in which cuts or inadequate funding are affecting programs they run or rely on, many managers are ultimately (and quite understandably) afraid to 'bite the hand that feeds them', even as our project has become, in fact, quite nuanced and celebratory of public service sites. There is a climate of fear right now, as our federal government continues to clamp down on

organizations they deem too political.[789] Executive Directors of social service

organizations are forced to be masters of diplomacy, no matter how critical their

personal views are. Whidden and I have learned that we take a risk investing

time and energy into work with a site we've been invited to unless the director of

that site has personally welcomed our project.[790]

Negotiating power-infused differences in perspective is a critical challenge

in site-specific socially engaged work. These are, inevitably, what Honig calls

"dilemmatic spaces."[791] This may be less obvious in projects that focus on a

neighbourhood or a 'home' but comes to the fore when a project examines

workplaces and public assets. Yet it is often obscured in discourse on socially

engaged art. The Toronto Arts Foundation (previously Toronto Arts Council

Foundation) has defined place-making in this way:

> Place-making describes the process of creating spaces rooted in the local
> ecology of neighbourhoods – the existing demographic and physical
> landscape – in hopes of harnessing these assets to generate a greater
> sense of identity, stability and belonging among local residents. Place-
> making plants the seeds for increased local participation in the development
> of neighbourhoods. In the process of art-making, community-engaged
> projects revitalize urban spaces including parks, community centres,
> libraries, recreational facilities and housing complexes as well as other less
> likely venues. They catalyze community cohesiveness and social change
> while creating beauty and opportunities for celebration.[792]

We can see in this discourse an emphasis on cohesion, celebration, revitalization

and belonging. But what of site-specific socially engage projects that examine

contentious issues?

As REPOhistory learned in their *Civil Disturbances* project, to make public art that engages with the politics of the city is always to simultaneously fight for the right to speak at all in public space, which is in fact very tightly controlled. Whidden and I have not yet tried to guerilla-install any of our signs because we fear that we would lose legitimacy in the eyes of potential project partners and we rely on this legitimacy for funding. But asking for permission to install our signs in public space has been to encounter a bureaucratic wall. When we looked into gaining permission to install our Perram House sign we were referred to the City of Toronto's Protocols Office and were immediately made aware of how lengthy and bureaucratic a process it would be to follow through with applying for a permit to install. We are trying to incorporate the challenges of public conversation into our work, to make challenges like the Protocols office and our rejection by the Toronto Public Library part of the DEPARTMENT's backstory and 'performance'.

Not only does the City emphasize cohesion and celebration in their literature but so too do these values impact access to funding. In order to apply for a community arts grant from the City of Toronto, for example, artists must find a "community partner". While this may come out of good intentions (avoiding paternalistic 'plop art' for example) in the case of the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY, a contentious project, it has posed a significant challenge. Who are we to partner with? We will never receive a letter of partnership on Toronto Public Library letterhead and couldn't have applied to work with the ex-staff of Perram House as they are not unto themselves an organization. Critical Art

Ensemble's comments on the problem of partnerships in community art are worth

repeating at length here:

> In spite of what some artists might say, and in spite of the fact that "community-based art" is becoming a sanctioned bureaucratic category, very little work pertaining to "community" is being done. Most cases are in actuality projects with localized bureaucracies. No artist can just walk into an alien territory and become a part of it. To successfully do such a thing takes years of participatory research. Be that as it may, assuming that an artist has successfully navigated the cultural bureaucracy and acquired money for a community project (for which an artist generally has one year to prove h/erself) just how will s/he insinuate h/erself into a "community?" The easiest way is to have the project mediated by a bureaucracy that claims to represent the community. A school, a community center, a church, a clinic, etc., is then selected, often because it is willing to participate in the project. The bureaucratic experts from the selected institution will represent the community and tailor the project to their specifications in a negotiation that also accounts for the desires of the artist. When the process is over, who has actually spoken?[793]

Of course, as Kester points out, Critical Art Ensemble is unfair to critical

community-based artists here, many of whom are aware of these contradictions

and negotiate them carefully.[794] But indeed it is true that to partner with an

organization, one needs permission from the top of that organization and that, in

the case of our project, the people in charge most often want to avoid critical

public dialogue (even as they themselves may be privately very concerned about

dwindling public funding and the challenges of continuing to run an organization

in the face of cuts). These are legitimate concerns and, as artists who seek to

ally ourselves with these organizations, we have worked hard to find ways to

work within this context.

The DEPARTMENT is currently negotiating this challenge in four ways.

First, we seek out directors of organizations who are open to the project and who

advocate politically for the service sector. Sometime such directors find us, a particularly rewarding experience. Second, we are developing an online memory archive so that we can tell the stories of sites we have worked with but ultimately not been welcomed to make a sign for. Many managers we have spoken with would be fine with an online archive but will not entertain the idea of a sign or live event. This way they are not implicated and the project cannot threaten the goodwill of funders. Third, we have altered our project's scope. We are no longer only looking to work with services that have lost funding but are open to working with any public service. This altered language around our project allows us to 'get in the door' while still marking an invisible infrastructure in all of its nuances. It also allows us to work in a continuous way with a site even as its funding status is in flux. We have learned that it can be unclear up until the final hour whether a service will close or live another day. Finally, we have applied for community arts grants in partnership with public sector unions (OPSEU, for example) and other service advocacy organizations. Despite these four alterations to our approach, however, we may yet work with a site up to a point and then be rejected by management for anything other than a purely celebratory approach. We are committed to maintaining our artistic integrity in this regard, though always contextually, as we navigate different perspectives about each site.

Attempting to work with public service sites across the city has been a second critical challenge in this project. A relational approach to the city, as I argued in Chapter Four, is critical, as place-making and displacement are dialectical processes. Public service cuts disproportionately affect parts of the "in-

between city"[795]- parts of the city that are already marginalized and have access to less public infrastructure. And no individual public service sites operate in isolation (as per Massey's reminder to view places as "constellations" formed by "flows").[796] They are part of an interconnected web. Harm reduction staff at Queen West Community Health Centre told us, for example, that now that the Sherbourne Health Bus no longer travels to the west-end of the city because the funds aren't there to do so, Queen West Community Health Centre has to serve more people on its existing budget.[797] When social services were cut in the 1990s under premier Mike Harris, library usership went up, as people looked for somewhere safe and comfortable to spend their days.[798] Unfortunately, the public library system also sustained cutbacks in those years.[799] Added to this are complex funding structures for each service site. Most of the sites we've worked with operate with grants from all levels of government and are in that sense not 'locally' produced. They are, as Massey puts it with regard to cities more broadly, "heterogeneous constellations of trajectories."[800] To work hyperlocally, then, (i.e. only in one neighbourhood or only with a couple of service sites) would deny the complex web in which these sites exist. On one hand, I've already shown that hyperlocal site-specificity is where the affective power of this project lies but, at the same time, the DEPARTMENT needs to work with sites across the city in order to maintain the spatial imagination necessary to consider public infrastructure.

Yet, funding for socially engaged art, particularly in the form of community arts grants, tends to emphasize local relationships. Again, this is for good reason.

It is in large part a response to 'plop art' approach to public art and appropriative

relationships between artists and residents. But it does make work that attempts

to make connections between sites difficult. Added to this are the ways in which

personal connections in Toronto are often geographically and class bound.

Whidden and I both live in a downtown west neighbourhood of the city and

neither of us work in the social services. It has taken us a very long time and

significant effort to make connections with service providers outside of the

downtown, though we have had some success with this recently. Our own social

locations and our role as artists are something I want to turn to now in relation to

Honig's concept of dilemmatic space. As all social processes do, this project

operates within a dilemmatic space and, as white middle-class artists engaging

with questions of service loss, we are always in a dilemmatic space as we work.

We are service users ourselves and are therefore engaging with an issue that

very much affects us, as it affects everyone in Toronto (a key point of the

project). Our project itself relies on public funds and is therefore vulnerable to

cuts to public infrastructure. But we as individuals have relative social privilege in

relation to the service users we work with at some sites, like shelters and meal

programs. The dilemmatic space in which we are working raises a host of

questions that we have had to grapple with. I turn to these now.

Dilemmatic space: The DEPARTMENT's 'workplace'

There are a number of ways in which one can consider the

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY in relation to Honig's concept of

dilemmatic space and agonist theories of democracy more broadly. Clearly, the context in which we have undertaken this project is, in itself, dilemmatic. Honig argues that we are not only presented with dilemma in singular episodes but in fact exist in constant dilemmatic space, both internally and within the "terrain of our existence."[801] She writes:

> to take difference- and not just identity- seriously in democratic theory is to affirm the inescapability of conflict and the ineradicability of resistance to the political and moral projects of ordering subjects, institutions and values…It is to give up on the dream of a place called home- a place free of power, conflict and struggle.[802]

Following Honig, we can consider the many ways in which city life entails everyday dilemmas, as we negotiate our obligations to ourselves and others (always imperfectly), moving through our homes, neighbourhoods, our workplaces and the city at large. And yet privileged city dwellers are capable of inuring themselves to the dilemmas they encounter, repressing the unease that arises every time they pass someone asking for money on the street, their unease as climate change increasingly shows itself in urban life and, I would argue, the unease produced by failing public infrastructure (crumbling public schools and transit systems, for example). Some people are able to ignore these dilemmas and others less so, depending on material privilege and ideology. To stop and acknowledge the dilemma of city life is to consider another path of action, some sort of change in our ways or resistance. At the least, acknowledgment of the dilemma requires acknowledgment of our own contradictions, of the social responsibilities that we fail to address through our

actions. Acknowledgment of the dilemma of social life in the city entails a

rethinking of what Massey calls our "geographies of responsibility."[803] Massey

argues that we must move beyond a "nested dolls" approach to social obligation

(in which people feel diminishing responsibility to people at each step removed

from them- taking responsibility first for home and family, then for neighbourhood,

then nation, etc.). She writes:

> in the light of the way of imagining space and place that I have been
> talking about, could we not open up that set of nested boxes? Could we
> not consider a different geography of care and responsibility? We might
> think of it as an ethics, a politics, of connectivity rather than of nested
> territories. Specifically we could open up a bit more *the question of (the
> possibility of) responsibility and care at a distance*.[804]

This is precisely what the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY is attempting to

do, whether or not we are currently succeeding at it. Calling out Toronto as a

dilemmatic space, a site of mutual and far-reaching responsibility is a key

element of the DEPARTMENT's work. This is why we perform the maintenance

work we do (care for wounded sites) and we try to foster dialogue across

different relationships to service sites. In different moments in our lives city

residents will need different elements of our public infrastructure. And each

individual will rely on different kinds of public assets in the course of their life. By

drawing on different perspectives regarding each site and by emphasizing the

partiality of any individual's knowledge of each site through our memory

collection process, the tenor of our signs and our live sign unveiling events we

are confronting both the limits of our own knowledge of each site (and, implicitly,

the city) as well as the limits of our audience's knowledge. We can only know the

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value of our common assets through dialogue across our differences. And we

must extend our sense of responsibility beyond our own networks.

And yet, unlike a problem that can be solved, a dilemma always leaves a

remainder.[805] Dilemmas, in other words, cannot be solved but, rather, require

compromise, imperfection and only partial reconciliation. We can only ever

partially know what these sites represent even as, by drawing on collective

knowledge, we must either maintain them or alter them for the better or suffer the

consequences. Performance theorist Kathleen Irwin argues that site-specific

performance can be powerful precisely because it engages with

"phenomenological dilemma." Referring to site-specific performer/theorist Mike

Pearson's "archaeological" approach to site-specificity, she writes:

> This process involves an attitude suspicious of orthodoxy that
> acknowledges the impossibility of any final account in making sense of what
> we perceive cognitively, of that which was never certain in the first place.
> This phenomenological dilemma ponders how much the perception of
> reality can tell us about what is real and this ambiguity is, in fact, central to
> their practice.[806]

The 'phenomenological dilemma' that Irwin refers to is a result of what Massey

calls the power-geometry of place. No two people live in the same city. Our

experiences of the city are subjective, partial and entwined in our positionality

vis-à-vis different social categories (race, class, gender and others). In Chapter

Four I argued that forming social solidarities premised on a sense of

disorientation (a sense of the wrong place) is a challenge. The DEPARTMENT

OF PUBLIC MEMORY represents an attempt to answer this challenge. It offers a

form of coming together around shared "public things"[807] that avoids emphasis on

shared relationships to these "things" (public service sites). Toronto residents have different relationships to our public infrastructure and I hope that recognition of our different relationships to this infrastructure provokes both a feeling of unease (a recognition of the city as a dilemmatic space) and an extended sense of social obligation.

Clearly, Whidden and I are also in a dilemmatic space as artists engaging with service loss. We are implicated in the dilemma, even as we act as 'facilitators' of dialogue in this project. As individuals, we are not neutral arbiters as we are both service-users ourselves and also relatively privileged vis-à-vis many of the people we encounter at service sites. Both of us are middle-class parents of young children, reliant on certain forms of public infrastructure (particularly daycare, transit, healthcare, community centres and libraries at the moment) but we are less reliant on public services than some of the people we engage with. Add to this the complexity that in our position as artists we are ourselves a vulnerable form of "public service". The DEPARTMENT relies on public funds (arts grants) to operate and is itself struggling to survive.

How do we navigate the dilemmatic space that embodying the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY entails? Our project could be considered a form of ethnography, even as its performance element purposefully makes the lines between the 'real world' and that which is performed ambiguous. What is our ethical obligation as artists in light of the dilemmatic space in which we operate? This is a particularly pressing question in light of the trend of artist as 'service worker.' Not only have community artists been critiqued by Bishop and

others for performing an inadequate kind of replacement 'service' for the material support of the diminishing welfare state[808] so too are more and more social practice artists taking on pseudo-official roles as departments and service organizations. In many of these projects artists play the role of ethnographer, collecting and presenting artifacts or narratives from a specific locale. Critic Hal Foster asked important questions about this 'ethnographic turn' in his 1996 essay *The Artist as Ethnographer*. Are artists accessing alterity (i.e. telling stories of marginalized Others or engaging in self-Othering) in order to lay claim to authenticity vis-à-vis political struggle? What role do these forms of 'fieldwork' play in challenging institutional authority? Foster argues that when artists who play the role of ethnographer, 'mapping' sites (as our project does, in a sense), they may "confirm rather than contest the authority of the mapper over site in a way that reduces the desired exchange of dialogical fieldwork."[809] Kwon summarizes Foster's argument about ethnographic art in this way:

> the artist is typically an outsider who has the institutionally sanctioned authority to engage the locals in the production of their (self-) representation. The key concern for Foster is not only the easy conversion of materials and experiences of local everyday life into an anthropological exhibit.....but the ways in which the authority of the artist goes unquestioned.[810]

This concern is relevant to the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY. By taking on the role of a department and engaging service-users and staff in sharing their memories and ideas of specific sites we need to consider whether, in fact, we are contributing to "ethnographic self-fashioning" in which "the artist is not decentered so much as the other is fashioned in artistic guise."[811]

There are a few ways to respond to Foster's important concerns as they pertain to the DEPARTMENT's work and the dilemmatic space we put ourselves in as we take on the role of 'the DEPARTMENT'. The most crucial way we navigate this dilemmatic space and our semi-ethnographic role is to simultaneously retain authorial responsibility for the project and undercut our authority as a department. Whidden and I have decided that our role as DEPARTMENT workers is that of "wise fools." This means that we maintain a stance that is both humble and ultimately absurd. Our website reads in caps: "We are a tiny department with a huge job to do." We play up the fact that despite its extremely important mission (to maintain the memory of common assets in the city) our department is bound to fail. In fact, our project has its own inadequacy written all over it. Part of the joke is that we, with little or no funding, have taken on the enormous task of maintaining public memory of Toronto's services, particularly those that are threatened by government cutbacks. While we are 'on the job' we are not 'up to the job'.[812]

Revealing our department's own vulnerability to political decisions is crucial, I think, to undercutting our authority and thereby questioning our narration of the city. We are working on finding ways to further emphasize this vunerability, playing with taglines like, "The DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY: Another service our city can't afford to lose." We want to emphasize our lack of authority by narrating our interactions with the City's "Protocols" office and the Reference Library (where we may apply to archive our signs as ephemera of a struggling art collective- a brilliant idea proposed by a supportive librarian). It is crucial that we

maintain the performative elements of all of our assertions about each site. There should always be questions left as to what the site represents and how it could be improved. This adds to the vulnerability we already embody as the DEPARTMENT. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, we suspect that people speak with us because, even as we are not telling them personally about *our* relationships to each site, we are also taking a risk by wearing the uniforms we do (replete with absurd garbage can) and asking to have a public conversation. In Toronto's public spaces, this is indeed unusual and vulnerable behaviour (though *much* less vulnerable than it would be if we were younger, racialized or didn't read in our behaviour as middle-class).

Even as we highlight the ways in which we are not 'up to the job', however, we take the job very seriously. This also seems crucial to negotiating the dilemmatic space of holding others' memories (or at least their performance of their memories). To gather stories and do nothing with them is to dishonour the relationships we enter into with each individual we speak with. People have been generous with their time, ideas and memories precisely because they want to be heard publically. We may appear clownlike in our performances but we are also utterly sincere in our desire to get each sign 'right' according to the many different perspectives of those we've spoken with.

Critiques of site-specific ethnographic work, work that 'maps sites', comes out of concern that such work makes facile links between specific places and Othered identities. In other words, even as it claims to 'reclaim,' it can all too easily present an illusion of cohesion where in fact there is heterogeneity. We

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have to be careful in our work to retain elements of surprise, incongruent

juxtapositions and not to associate cohesive identities with the public service

sites we examine. This is where a relational approach is pivotal. We all rely on

the public safety net at different times and in different ways. Our relationships to

services are not static. Public policies lead to increased need for some kinds of

services. The DEPARTMENT strives to emphasize this, even as we tell very

specific (hyperlocal) stories. To do so keeps the project focused on social

relationships; on the spaces in between people in this city (one set of which are

our shared infrastructure), rather than focused on specific identities of the people

who share their memories with us. This project is ultimately about the spaces in

between city dwellers, the cracks in our collective knowledge and our awareness

of the city's trajectory.

Finally, a way that we try to negotiate the dilemmatic space that we are in

as creators and performers of this project is to be responsive to the contexts we

find ourselves in. In this sense also we take our job very seriously. At some sites

our role may be to help people grieve collectively. We learned this through our

work at the RTC and Perram House. At others yet, our performances and signs

may become a more heated public debate. We have to take our cues from the

relationships we form at each site, even as we incorporate acknowledgment that

there are more views to be heard or even imagined than we have represented.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY's motivations for working site-specifically and dialogically, the potential of our site-specific performances and some of the challenges we face as we attempt to hold on to a broad geographical imagination in the project. I have also discussed this project in terms of the concept of dilemmatic space, probing the ways in which Whidden and I attempt to negotiate the dilemmas of our positionality in relation to what is semi-ethnographic artistic work.

To write about one's own work is ultimately to acknowledge gaps between intention and execution. While I am able to analyze the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY's intentions and artistic process using the lenses I developed in Chapter Four, I am unable to move beyond my own perspective on what we are accomplishing through this project. Intuitively and analytically, it seems to me that we have created an interesting process through which to consider questions of social responsibility and common care. In other words, it seems to me that, to a certain extent, we are embodying the geographical imagination that Massey advocates. At the same time I am aware that this work will always be a form of dilemma, rife with contradictions and that I will have to rely on critical feedback from others in order to continue it. I hope that this chapter will catalyze feedback from others, so that the project can continue to evolve.

Beyond the challenges of site-specific engagement that I have named in this chapter to my mind the biggest challenge for the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC

MEMORY as it moves into future work, will be how to work productively with nostalgia. While this project does not take up neighbourhoods or homes in a literal sense it is premised on a different kind of 'home yearning', which is yearning for a civically engaged city. We must be careful not to veer into nostalgia for public services 'as they were' but rather work with this yearning for civic engagement productively, even as we explicitly focus on public service sites.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have examined both the potential and challenges of site-specific participatory art practices. This research was prompted by the seemingly paradoxical provocations issued by Lucy Lippard and Miwon Kwon in their respective writings on site-specific art. Lippard and Kwon both argue that the critical task for contemporary site-specific artists is to deepen social relations through disorientation. They challenge artists to foster long-term *commitments* even as they argue that artists must attend to the *instabilities* of place. They call for simultaneously *specific* and *"open-ended"*[813] explorations and ask us to be *"out of place"* with *"precision."*[814] These intriguing calls to radically reconceptualize place-based engagement both spurred me to examine site-specific participatory art practices in-depth and led me to develop analytical lenses through which to consider the criticality of these and future practices.

My primary research questions here have been:

- **What kinds of social engagement are made possible through site-specific artistic practices?**

- **What kinds of engagement are precluded or overlooked when artists try to engage their publics through explorations of specific urban sites?**

- **How can site-specific practices challenge spatial practices of domination in urban settings?**

- **How can site-specific artistic engagement offer new political imaginaries?**

I have sought answers to these questions not only out of curiosity, but also as a

practitioner who continues to work in the field of socially engaged art, and as a Torontonian who is deeply concerned about injustice and alienation in the city I live in. I worry about Toronto; about what it will look like by the time my children are adults, about who will get "priced out" or further displaced; about whether crumbling infrastructure will make it less and less liveable. This research has been a search, then, for the *political* relevance of site-specific practices, premised as much on material concerns as on intellectual interest.

In light of this, I want to conclude by discussing the projects I have examined in terms of their contributions to systemic social change. I will use this discussion to synthesize the answers to my research questions. My detailed analyses of REPOhistory, *Bridge of One Hair* and DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY deepen the literature on art as social practice. Comparison of these projects with regard to the relationship between art and change clearly illuminates both the power and the limitations of premising social engagement on site-specificity.

To begin with, this research makes clear that site-specific art can move well beyond creating "counter-images"[815]of the city. While inserting such counter-images into the urban landscape is part of what these projects do, and can be powerful in its own right, social practice today also aims to engage people in embodied site-specific experiences, explorations and conversations. REPOhistory's later projects, *Bridge of One Hair*, and DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY are all, to varying extents, premised on a belief that embodied dialogue and shared experiences are important steps toward social justice.

These projects are experiments in new ways of being together, new forms of

urban citizenship. Even as the artists behind them see them as forces for social

change, none of these projects explicitly articulate a vision of what that change

should look like. Like other contemporary participatory art practices, they are not

directed initiatives for social justice but, rather, non-foundational practices of

coming together to share stories and perspectives. These are contributions to

democracy, not in its narrowest sense, but in the sense proposed by radical

democratic theorists, who view all social spaces as terrains of political struggle

and "vibrant democracy" as both the recognition of the political in the everyday

and as ongoing counter-hegemonic struggle in everyday social spaces.[816] These

are not *utopian* practices then, as Kester might have it, but rather *place-based*

practices, practices that emerge out of specific social formations and that begin

to practice new relations *in place*.

All of the projects I have looked at here challenge hegemonic discursive

constructions of specific urban sites by bringing people together to make objects

and events. Beyond that, however, their respective contributions to systemic

social change are distinct. REPOhistory's projects maintained the city as a

politicized space during a period of increasing spectacle and securitization in

New York and other cities. Their work kept alternative understandings of urban

trajectories alive and insisted that these alternatives had a place in the urban

landscape. While I have argued that the *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* was less

effective at contesting the neutrality of space and sparking political debate than it

might have been, certain signs made for *Civil Disturbances* become rallying

points for already-existent coalitions. Each of these signs addressed specific local audiences. They were installed in the neighbourhoods these audiences lived in. And they related to issues that were already of pressing concern to their audiences. These were site-responsive art objects, which contributed to already-existent social movements. Because there were already venues for continued discussion on the issues they raised (housing and police violence), these signs were more readily able to contribute to dialogue. The fact that they were installed at the very sites where violence and discrimination had occurred (the sites of police shootings, for example) also allowed them to become focal points for ongoing public mourning. These art objects not only made visible the power and politics of everyday urban space (as did, arguably, all of REPOhistory's signs) but helped to claim urban sites as places to gather and grieve, bringing issues that could have been relegated to the private sphere into the public realm. The extent to which these signs contributed to material change (anti-racism training for police or reduction of police powers for example) cannot be known. But the artists who made them were clearly tied into social movements and this appears both to have made audience responses to them more powerful and to have allowed them to continue to serve a social purpose.

In contrast to REPOhistory's work, *Bridge of One Hair* was not an explicitly political project, though it intervened considerably in the politics of the neighbourhood it was based in. *Bridge of One Hair* shows us that site-specific projects can contribute to social change by strengthening social relationships and creating temporary experiences of 'communitas'; heightened moments of

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togetherness which allow those who experience them to imagine anew what social relations might look and feel like.[817] *Bridge of One Hair* also demonstrates that shared artistic processes can shift individual perceptions about who 'belongs' in a place. My analysis of this project makes it clear that many individuals came to feel recognized locally through *Bridge of One Hair*. The project also fostered new practices of place, encouraging participants to enter new buildings and travel new routes, both locally and in the city at large. Massey has argued that we must not only ask "do I belong to this place?" but also, "does this place belong to me?"[818] While ownership of place must inevitably extend beyond the symbolic to the material, it is clear that some participants in *Bridge of One Hair* did feel increased ownership of place as a result of the project. While, again, we can only guess at *Bridge of One Hair*'s direct contributions to systemic change, one can imagine that strengthening local relationships and creating deeper feelings of both belonging and ownership may have laid the ground for more overt political dialogue in the future. Ironically, for all that *Bridge of One Hair* challenged participants to develop a "sense of place beyond place"[819] it may yet have been most promising for material change at a local level.

My own work with the *DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY* brings people together site-specifically to discuss explicitly politicized issues. This project attempts to use specific sites as affective ciphers (what Freire calls "generative codes"[820]) to nurture deeper senses of mutual responsibility. Whether this has always been the *effect* of the DEPARTMENT's work thus far is questionable, but it has clearly initiated 'situated' conversations between different

stakeholders (service users, service staff and other Toronto residents). It has invited audiences, both those who are intimate with the sites and those who know nothing of them, to take moral responsibility for Toronto's social infrastructure. Like *Civil Disturbances*, it also claims public space as a site in which to mourn, celebrate and talk politics. At times it also draws on site-specificity to rally service users and staff to work together to defend specific services. In recent months the DEPARTMENT has worked with two different sites that were struggling to stay open in the face of funding cuts. In both cases, the processes of creating a commemorative sign and sharing memories in a public venue brought service users, staff and management together to affirm their commitments to each other and to the services at hand. Where these affirmations will lead them is as of yet undetermined but conversations about how to articulate the social value of these services to funders and a broader public have begun.

These, then, are the kinds of social engagement that are made possible by site-specific participatory practices. While the contributions these projects make to material change cannot be measured it is clear that they are politically valuable. Through them artists, participants and (sometimes) less intimate audiences can experience shifts in perception and develop new understandings of their commitments to each other and to the public sphere. These practices are powerful in that they can create and strengthen social relationships locally and, at times, extra-locally. They can help people to lay claim to urban spaces, to open conversations, to make relationships between the personal and the political, to

strengthen their commitments to sites they have a stake in, and to keep alternative visions for the future of the city alive. Their potential to contribute to change is increased when they are undertaken in relationship with other social institutions, organizations or movements. This allows the relationships and practices they initiate to continue beyond the life of the project. It may allow them to contribute further to material change.

Even as these site-specific practices have potential, close analysis of them also reveals the limitations of social engagement premised on site-specificity, even when it is approached with Massey's progressive spatial imagination. Responses to REPOhistory's *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* demonstrate the challenge of engaging inadvertent audiences in bustling and spectacular urban landscapes. An in-depth look at *Bridge of One Hair* reveals the challenges of contesting powerful urban imaginaries in a city of profound spatialized inequity. Analysis of *Bridge of One Hair* also calls Massey's insistence on a fluid geographical imagination into question. There may be times when it is strategic for marginalized groups, like the youth who were alienated in the project, to focus precisely on a bounded sense of the local in order to lay claim to place, and to the importance of their own voices.

The experiences of the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC MEMORY suggest that, while it is, for the most part, politically vital to maintain the relational geographical imagination put forth by Massey, it remains a challenge to do this while engaging deeply with specific sites. In this project, the affective power of speaking specifically about one service, and bringing forth the stories of why that

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particular place matters, can make it difficult to hold on to an expanded spatial imagination. The DEPARTMENT's work moves participants to feel responsible to a specific site and to each other, but whether participants make the leap between this feeling and a broader sense of geographical responsibility is unclear. Even as both Massey and Honig ask us to consider people and places beyond our immediate environs, the affective power of face-to-face engagement and of physically emplaced experiences can at times emotionally overpower this imperative. Embodying a relational geographical imagination and a "dilemmatic" approach to the social is an ongoing challenge.

The detailed analyses I have provided in this dissertation serve to move us beyond generalized conclusions about what art can and can't "do" in the service of social change. My analyses are neither arguments for art's power to build consensus, nor do they privilege disruption and unease over celebration and committed relationships. They are, instead, examples of close contextual reads of participatory practices, which pay attention to how all stages of artistic production produce meaning (from research to making, from installation to varied responses to the work). While many different arguments have been made as to why participatory artistic practices can be powerful agents of social change, these practices demand to be analyzed carefully and contextually. Today's socially engaged artists are operating in incredibly complex terrains. To look at their work is to disentangle complex social, cultural and political dynamics. Yet, this is what is required if we are to move beyond generalized or vague claims as to the powers of social practice and of creative placemaking.

The widespread replacement of terms like socially engaged art and community-based art with the term "social practice" reflects increasingly blurred boundaries between art and other social practices.[821] While I have written this dissertation in the hope that it will provoke critical dialogue amongst socially engaged artists, particularly those working to animate specific sites or local communities, it may indeed prove useful to a range of "creative placemakers," from artists to urban planners, activists to arts policy makers, community organizers to funders. As training programs in community art and social practice continue to develop,[822] I also hope that the ideas I have offered here will be of interest to those studying in this field and to future practitioners.

The kinds of questions that I hope artists, funders, students and educators will consider when creating or responding to site-specific socially engaged artistic practices stem directly from the critical lenses I outlined in Chapter Four of this dissertation. I reiterate them here in relation to those lenses.

Spatial Imagination

Questions we can ask of site-specific socially engaged practices in relation to spatial imagination include:

- How is site conceptualized in the practice? Where do the imagined boundaries of the site end?

- Which identity or identities does the project discursively affiliate with the site?

- Which aspects of the site's heterogeneity are emphasized? Which are left out of focus and why?

- How does the practice recognize, challenge or work with different relationships to place that are based on different social locations? In other words, how does it acknowledge the 'power-geometry of time-space compression'[823]?

- Does the practice create a fixed sense of place or open it up as a site of possibility, of potential for social transformation? How does it do this?

These kinds of questions can help us to think about the spatial imagination a given practice embodies. A site-specific practice may embody some elements of what Massey calls a "progressive sense of place" but not others.

Relational Specificity

Considerations of site-specific practices vis-à-vis the lens of relational specificity include asking questions like:

- Does the practice make relationships between 'local' dynamics and 'extralocal' dynamics?

- How does the project reflect flows and relationships between the site at hand and other sites?

- How does the practice discursively frame other places by virtue of its framing of 'the local'?

- How does the practice contest or reify hegemonic representations of the site at different scales?

Politics of Engagement

Finally, thinking about the politics of engagement in site-specific socially engaged artistic practices entails asking questions such as:

- To what extent does the practice search for or claim social consensus? In what ways does it allow for or engage dissensus?

- How does the practice expose, juxtapose or sustain tension between conflicting viewpoints? How is conflict engaged?

- How does the practice build new solidarities and/or strengthen specific communities?

- Does the practice claim or reclaim a site symbolically for specific groups? What impact does this have?

- What are the relationships between this artistic practice and other sociopolitical structures, including institutions and social movements?

- Does this art practice challenge common understandings about who belongs in the site and to whom the site belongs? Are new relationships built out of these challenges?

- Is the practice open-ended? Is knowledge co-produced through it or are participants framed as recipients of the artist's revelations?

- How does the practice move participants to become aware of their own epistemological limits? Who is challenged to reconsider their perspectives or sense of place?

It is important to clarify that these questions are not meant to serve as a checklist with which to identify 'best practices' in site-specific socially engaged art. In my opinion, to delineate best practices is antithetical to any call for site-specificity or for art more broadly. Critical assessment of any socially engaged art practice will require awareness of the specific context in which it has been undertaken[824] and artists will always find new ways to contest, reimagine and reclaim sites. These questions are, rather, best understood as prompts for careful thinking about the sociopolitical functions of site-specific socially engaged art practices. They are an attempt to consider and retain the radical potential of work in this field.

As I noted in my analysis of *Bridge of One Hair*, given the scarcity of funding for the arts and the consequent hustle involved in making a living as an artist, it is a tall order to ask socially engaged artists to take the time to probe deeply into the kinds of questions I have just posed or to publicly expose moments of dilemma, tension or doubt in their own practices. At the moment, artists who commit themselves to socially engaged work do so in a context of fierce competition for funding that is both scarce and short-term. Those working in the field are typically expected to pay themselves and their collaborators less than a living wage on a project-to-project basis.[825] To bid successfully for funding in this field requires savvy employment of discourses of inclusion, community and democratic participation. Indeed, at least in Toronto, socially engaged artists are held to high ethical and political standards, particularly in light of the limited resources allotted to their work. And, yet, to speak the language of democratic participation is very different than to practice it. If socially engaged art practices are to live up to their transformative potential, and if all creative placemakers are to take the time to attend to the kinds of questions I have posed in this dissertation, more abundant and longer-term funding for work in this field is needed, and from funders who understand the tensions inherent in the work. We also need more venues in which socially engaged artists are encouraged to reflect critically and openly on the failures, missed moments, challenges and complexities that work in this field entails. Such venues would only be possible in a context of increased funding, however, as, currently, artists and practitioners without job security feel immense pressure to promote and protect their own

"brand." In this regard, I hope that my reflections in this dissertation will prove useful to arts councils and other granting institutions.

In my introduction I asked whether site-specificity was a productive premise for social engagement in the 21st century global city. The short answer is yes, but artists who wish to contribute to progressive social change must heed Rosalyn Deutsche's imperative to familiarize themselves with the complexities of urban relations.[826] I hope that this dissertation will inform future practice, making it easier for myself and other artists and "placemakers" to resist "fuzzy vibrancy,"[827] creating instead carefully considered forms of coming together which contribute to movements for social justice.

Notes

[1] Some examples include: *[murmur]* by Shawn Micallef, Gabe Sawhney and James Roussel, audio installation,Toronto, 2003; *FRAG on the Main*, a graphic installation by Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable (ATSA), Montreal, 2004-2006; the work of Los Angeles-based collective Fallen Fruit, who map fruit trees on public property throughout Los Angeles, 2004- ongoing; conversations and events by Oda Projesi, Istanbul, 2000-2005; performances and interventions by the Los Angeles Poverty Department, 1985- ongoing; Park Fiction's work in Hamburg, Germany, 1995- ongoing; Pulska Grupa's *Katarina*, Pula, Croatia, 2009- ongoing; *Jane's Walk*, a movement and annual festival of locally led walking tours in Toronto and over 100 other cities; *Growing Vine Street* project, which involves the greening of a Seattle street, 1995- ongoing; Austrian collective WochenKlausur's many socially engaged projects, 1993- ongoing; Rick Lowe's *Project Row Houses*, Houston, Texas, 1993- ongoing; Tim Groves' *Missing Plaque Project*, paper and wheatpaste graphic installations,Toronto, 2002-ongoing; Timeanddesire's ongoing street sign installations in Toronto.

[2] For a discussion of an increased curatorial focus on place internationally see Doherty, "Curating Wrong Places". In the United States, "creative placemaking" is on the rise. According to Gadwa Nicodemus, "Fuzzy Vibrancy", 213: "The top funders, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and ArtPlace (a collaboration between 13 foundations and 6 banks), have made a combined 232 grants in all 50 states, for an investment total of $41.6 million." In Canada, funders are beginning to employ the language of "creative placemaking" as well, but have focused more on the field of community arts (much of which is place-based). Toronto Arts Council Foundation's "A City Creative to Its Bones",13, makes explicit links between community art and place-making: "Place-making describes the process of creating spaces rooted in the local ecology of neighbourhoods – the existing demographic and physical landscape – in hopes of harnessing these assets to generate a greater sense of identity, stability and belonging among local residents. Place-making plants the seeds for increased local participation in the development of neighbourhoods. In the process of art-making, community-engaged projects revitalize urban spaces including parks, community centres, libraries, recreational facilities and housing complexes as well as other less likely venues. They catalyze community cohesiveness and social change while creating beauty and opportunities for celebration."

[3] Many different terms are used to refer to participatory artistic practices, including: community art; community-based art, new genre public art, dialogical art and relational aesthetics. See Cohen-Cruz, "Introduction to Community Art"; Lacy, *New Genre Public Art;* Kester, *Conversation Pieces;* Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*. Some of these different terms are not only semantic but refer to different genealogies of participatory art. I elaborate on the different ways in which participation, engagement and collaboration have been taken up in different lineages of this work throughout this dissertation but do use the terms "social practice", "socially engaged art" and "participatory art" indiscriminately when referring to contemporary practices. This is because they have been used interchangeably between critics, curators and artists themselves and have fluid definitions. Part of my project here is to better distinguish between these practices.

[4] Bishop, *Artificial Hells;* Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art.*

[5] The extent to which authorship is renounced varies widely in social practice. In *Artificial Hells*, Bishop argues that the most interesting participatory art practices today are tightly structured and that authorship still very much matters.

[6] Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 8.

[7] Ibid, 7.

[8] Bishop, *Artificial Hells.*

[9] Ibid, 2.

[10] This question has been a source of heated debate, particularly between Grant Kester and Claire Bishop in a series of exchanges in *Artforum*. I delve into this question and the complexity of each of their arguments in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

[11] See Helguera, *Education;* Kester, *The One and The Many*; Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Jackson, *Social Works*.

[12] Creative Time commissions and presents socially engaged public art projects in New York City. Creative Time's 2013 annual conference was dedicated to exploring *Art, Place, and Dislocation in the 21st Century City.* In the conference program, curator Nato Thompson writes: "The 2013 Creative Time Summit sets its sights on the fact that culture, for good or bad, is an active ingredient in the construction and shaping of the contemporary city. Tapping into widespread debate on this issue, this year's Summit provides a global platform for consideration of the trials, tribulations, artistic practices, campaigns, theories, and practicalities that accompany this phenomenon."

[13] Barndt, "Community Arts for Social Change".

[14] The historical and current dynamics of particular places have been the starting point for countless community art projects. Community artists have examined the changing or lost ecological features of urban sites (examples include the *Human River*, Toronto, 2005-2009*;* Jumblies Theatre's *Once a Shoreline*, Toronto, 2003; Carmen Rosen's annual *Renfrew Ravine Moon Festival* in Vancouver). They have intervened in local politics (Dale Hamilton's *Rockwood Community Play,* Rockwood, Ontario, 1990), challenged the gentrification of low-income neighbourhoods (Leeson and Dunn's *Docklands Community Poster Project,* London, 1981-1988; Vancouver Moving Theatre's *Condemned,* 2008) and examined the dynamics between settlers and Indigenous people over time (*Storyscapes Chinatown,* Vancouver, 2005-2006; Judy Baca's *Great Wall of L.A.*, begun 1974). Some community art projects have focused on the diversity of strangers who have landed in one place, telling stories both of displacement and arrival (MabelleARTS' *A Light in Midwinter Parade*, Toronto, 2012). Others have examined defining moments in the history of a local community (Shadowland Theatre's *The Bridge*, Toronto, 2005), beautified a specific place according to the aesthetics of local residents (Lily Yeh's *Village of Arts and Humanities,* Philadelphia,1989-ongoing) or confronted structural challenges faced by local people, such as poverty or violence (Los Angeles Poverty Department; Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *Tele Vecindario,* Chicago, 1992-1993).

[15] Kaye, *Site-specific Art*, 3.

[16] Most writing on counter-monuments has focused on artistic work in western Europe, with a particular focus on German attempts to address Holocaust history. Some particularly well known counter-monuments are: Christian Boltanski's *Missing House* (Berlin, 1990), Rachel Whiteread's *Nameless Library* (Vienna, 2000) and the *Monument against Fascism* by Jochen Gerz and Esther Chalev-Gerz (Hamburg-Harburg, 1986). Widely recognized counter-monumental work outside of western Europe is fewer and further between but includes Krzysztof Wodiczko's public projections (*Nelson's Column*, Trafalgar Square, London, 1985 or *The A-bomb Dome*, Hiroshima, 1999, for example). There are, however, many examples of artworks outside of Europe which fit the definition of the counter-monument as outlined by Young and, according to Moshenska, 23: "The central themes of disturbance, contestation and irresolution remain, but the field has been broadened, loosened and arguably strengthened." Artist Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds' critical signage projects (e.g. *Building Minnesota*) are an example of non-European artwork that can be considered counter-monumental.

[17] The 'Lure of the Local' is art critic Lucy Lippard's term. As I discuss further in this introduction, my work responds to her 1997 book on site-specific art, which is titled *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society.*

[18] Appadurai, "The Production of Locality"

[19] Ibid

[20] Ibid,178

[21] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 165.

[22] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

[23] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 165.

[24] More than half of the world's population now lives in cities according to "Urbanization: A Majority in Cities", United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), last modified May 2007, http://www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm. Four out of five Canadians now live in urban areas. "Census Snapshot of Canada- Urbanization," Statistics Canada, last modified November 21, 2008, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2007004/10313-eng.htm.

[25] Withers, "Place and the Spatial Turn'"; See also Warf and Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*.

[26] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

[27] Foucault's work has been key on this point. See, for example, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.*

[28] See, for example, Razack, *Race, Space and the Law*.

[29] One need only think of the recent demonstrations in response to the killing of a young black man by police in Ferguson, Missouri or of "Take Back the Night" marches by women as examples of this.

[30] Peck, Theodor and Brenner, "Neoliberalism Redux?" For an interesting analysis of the relationship between the field of community arts and the production of the neoliberal city see Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City."

[31] See McLean, "Digging Into the Creative City: A Feminist Critique."

[32] *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism*, 23.

[33] See Barndt, "Introduction. Rooted in Place, Politics, Passion and Praxis"; Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Thompson, *Living As Form*.

[34] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Thompson, *Living As Form*.

[35] Jameson, "Taking Space Personally."

[36] Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility".

[37] Withers, "Place and the 'Spatial Turn'", 638.

[38] Lippard, *Lure of the Local*.

[39] See also, Harvey, "From Space to Place."

[40] Anxiety about globalization can stem from very different ideologies. It can be anxiety about flows of people, leading to increased nationalism or can be anxiety about global consolidations of power or homogenization of culture.

[41] Huyssen, *Present Pasts*.

[42] Ibid. Huyssen writes: "My hypothesis is that…memory and musealization together are called upon to provide a bulwark against obsolescence and disappearance, to counter our deep anxiety about the speed of change and the ever-shrinking horizons of time and space" (23).

[43] McAuley, Site-specific Performance, 28

[44] Of course, it can also be argued that the emergence of counter-monumental work reflects a post-structural understanding of knowledge and history as fragmented, partial, and socially located.

[45] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

[46] See Thompson, *Living As Form*.

[47] See: Razack, "Storytelling for Social Change"; Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* and "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy."

[48] David Harvey argues that "the metropolis is now the point of massive collision…over the accumulation by dispossession visited upon the least well-off and the developmental drive that seeks to colonize space for the affluent" ("The Right to the City, 39).

[49] See Stanger-Ross and Ross, "Placing the Poor"

[50] See United Way of Toronto, *Poverty by Postal Code 2*.

[51] Ibid

[52] Hulchanski, *Three Cities Within Toronto*.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Toronto mayor Rob Ford's popularity is to a certain extent a product of the city's polarization. A conservative, Ford worked as a volunteer with youth for many years. He champions residents of Toronto Community Housing (TCH), even as he advocates for cuts to social programs in the name of 'the taxpayer.'

[56] Witness the language in the Toronto Arts Council Community Arts Grant guidelines: "Persistently low incomes and a widening income gap between the rich and the poor in many communities threatens the social cohesiveness that has marked the success of the city. Some neighbourhoods have experienced increasing levels of gun violence and criminal gang involvement resulting in city-wide concerns about community safety. An unequal distribution of services and facilities has left some neighbourhoods less well-equipped to deal with the social challenges they face." Toronto Arts Council, *2014 Community Arts Organizations: Multi-year*

Operating Grant. Accessed August 26, 2014.
http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/2014_CommunityArts_multiyear_report

[57]Arts Starts is a Toronto example of a community arts company working in underserved neighbourhoods. Art Starts describes their work this way: "Art Starts works in four under-resourced Toronto neighbourhoods. We bring together professional artists – dancers, musicians, visual artists, actors, and playwrights – with residents of all ages and collaborate with other community organizations. Together we create accessible and dynamic art projects that reflect the identities and aspirations of each community." http://www.artstarts.net/our-manifesto/mission/ Accessed August 26, 2014.

[58] Ford-Smith, "Whose Community? Whose Art," 13. See, also, Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City."

[59] Hutcheson, "The Community Artist In the Creative City: Engaged Citizen or Regeneration Bulldozer?"; McLean, "Staging the Competitive and Collaborative Creative City: L'Oreal Luminato"; Levin and Solga, "Building Utopia: Performance and the Fantasy of Urban Renewal in Contemporary Toronto." The work of art collective Park Fiction in Hamburg is a particularly famous example of contemporary artistic responses to gentrification.

[60] See Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class* for an example of literature on 'creative cities'.

[61] Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City."

[62] See, again, Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class*. Also see Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class*"* for a critique of this premise. The City of Toronto's 2003 *Culture Plan* and 2008 *Creative City Planning Framework* are examples of policy papers premised on this idea.

[63] Gadwa Nicodemus, "Fuzzy Vibrancy".

[64] ArtPlace, *ArtPlace: Invitation for Letter of Inquiry: ArtPlace America 2014 Innovation Grants Program*. 2013. http://www.utexas.edu/research/osp/proposal/limited/artplace_innovation.html, Accessed August 26, 2014

[65] Gadwa Nicodemus, "Fuzzy Vibrancy."

[66] See Kester, "A Critical Framework for Dialogical Practice" in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*.

[67] This is Henri Lefebvre's term. See Harvey, "The Right to the City" for an elaboration of its meaning today.

[68] Kwon, 2002; Bishop, 2012.

[69] As I have already noted, the lineages of these fields are interconnected. It can be argued that distinctions between them are becoming less and less necessary in light of recent social practice. Nonetheless, they have historically represented different approaches to social engagement.

[70] "Who was REPOhistory", REPOhistory website, last accessed June 1, 2011, http://www.repohistory.org/repo/repo_who.php3

[71] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 44.

[72] See Nato Thompson's Introduction to *Living as Form* for a discussion of social practice in relation to the political sphere.

[73] See Butler, *Henri Lefebvre*; Harvey, *Right to the City*. Henri Lefebvre's 'right to the city' is the right to collective self-determination and deliberation over how space is produced. As David Harvey puts it, it is "far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization" (*Right to the City*, 23).

[74] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Thompson, *Living As Form*; Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*.

[75] For examples of scholarship on place that have stretched the limits of geographical imagination, making the field itself interdisciplinary see; Appadurai, "The Production of Locality"; Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*; Deutsche, "Uneven Development"; Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places"; hooks, "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance; Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*; Rose, *Feminism and Geography*.

[76] I elaborate on the theories this literature draws on significantly throughout this dissertation.

[77] Lippard, *Lure of the Local*, 6.

[78] Ibid, 286-7

[79] Ibid, 290.

[80] Ibid, 291.

[81] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 159. Drawing on Lefebvre's work on the "production of space", Kwon reminds us that capitalism relies on the production of (spatial) difference. And, certainly, Kwon's synthesis of Lippard's vision is reminiscent of place-marketing efforts in which a specific region, town or neighbourhood is nostalgically promoted as 'authentic' or as a step back to a time when life was more 'simple'.

[82] Kwon, *One Place After Another,* 159.

[83] Ibid*,* 160.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Kwon, "The Wrong Place", 34.

[86] Kwon refers to Homi Bhaba's essay "Double Visions" here. This "power-geometry" of globalization is also one of Doreen Massey's key contributions, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter Four.

[87] Kwon, "The Wrong Place"; Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[88] Ibid, 166. Italics in original.

[89] Ibid. Italics in original.

[90] Doherty, "Curating Wrong Places", page number unknown.

[91] See Felshin, *But it it art?;* Lacy, *New Genre Public Art*; Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art*; Gérin and McLean, *Public Art in Canada*; Senie and Webster, *Critical Issues in Public Art*;

Suderburgh, *Space, Site, Intervention*; Young, *At Memory's Edge*; Kaye, *Site-specific art*; Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[92] See Finkelpearl, *What We Made*; Kester, *Conversation Pieces* and *The One and the Many*; Bishop, "The Social Turn" and *Artificial Hells*; Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*; Papastergiadis, "Collaboration in Art and Society."

[93] For examples, see: Pinder, 2005; Till, 2008, 2012. As a result of the prevalence of 'creative city' policies there has also been a spate of literature over the past decade focused on the effects of such policies on urban spaces. See, for example: Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class".

[94] See Hulchanski, *The Three Cities Within Toronto*.

[95] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 12.

[96] Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, p. x.

[97] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

[98] Many people have made this point, including: Kester, most recently in *The One and The Many*; Bishop, most recently in *Artificial Hells* and; Helguera, in *Education for Socially Engaged Art*.

[99] "Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place" was Doreen Massey's title for a 1995 essay, in which she argued that emphases on place are not per se reactionary or nostalgic.

[100] See Gay McAuley, "Site-specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator".

[101] As I acknowledge throughout this thesis, however, my use of the critical scholarship on place neglects consideration of the non-human elements of place.

[102] Claire Bishop has been particularly insistent on this point. See her 2006 anthology *Participation,* as well as *Artificial Hells*.

[103] See in particular the literature by (and debates between) Claire Bishop and Grant Kester.

[104] Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home."

[105] Massey, "Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place."

[106] In *Living As Form*, Nato Thompson's anthology on socially engaged art, Thompson notes that: "Determining which forms of social engagement truly lead towards social justice is a constant source of debate" (32). This may be wishful thinking on Thompson's part. From where I stand, I think we could use more debate on this question.

[107] Johanne Lamoureux as quoted in Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 205.

[108] See my own essay "The Community Artist In the Creative City: Engaged Citizen or Regeneration Bulldozer?" See also: McLean, "Staging the Competitive and Collaborative Creative City: L'Oreal Luminato"; Levin and Solga, "Building Utopia: Performance and the Fantasy of Urban Renewal in Contemporary Toronto."

[109] Project Row Houses was founded by artist Rick Lowe in 1993 and continues today as a non-profit organization.

[110] Hulchanski, *The Three Cities Within Toronto*.

[111] Keil and Brennan, *The Global Cities Reader*.

[112] Boudreau, Keil and Young, *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism*.

[113] Dewar, *The City After Abandonment*.

[114] Dirlik, Place-based Imagination: Globalism and the Politics of Place", 40.

[115] Raymond Williams' *Keywords* has influenced my thinking about terms and the meanings they carry contextually.

[116] Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[117] Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*.

[118] Ibid

[119] Philosopher Michel deCerteau, for example, uses *plac*e to refer to the physical infrastructure within which humans create *space* through practice (*The Practice of Everyday Life*). Geographer Ed Soja coined the term "thirdspace" to challenge binary thinking that keeps emphases on the materiality of space separate from emphases on space as a mental construct. Anthropologist Marc Augé has argued that places are being replaced by non-places, impersonal sites that are experienced fleetingly due to increased global mobility (*Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*). These are but a few examples of the different ways in which the terms space and place are employed.

[120] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

[121] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.

[122] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 2.

[123] Ibid. Italics in original.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid, 278.

[126] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Bishop, "The Social Turn."

[127] Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*.

[128] Kester, *The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*.

[129] Thompson, *Living As Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, 21-22.
[130] Ibid.

[131] Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[132] Kwon, *One Place After Another*. Kwon talks about this slippage in "new-genre public art" but is referring to the same field of practice.

[133] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 111. 'Those who occupy a given site' are the words of curator Mary Jane Jacob, as quoted by Kwon.

[134] Jeff Kelley, as quoted by Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 108.

[135] Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[136] Hulchanski, *The Three Cities Within Toronto*.

[137] Leah Houston and Maggie Hutcheson. *We Are Here: The Monument Project* program. October 2008.

[138] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 19.

[139] See, for example: Barndt, "By whom and for whom? Intersections of participatory research and community arts"; Fals-Borda, "Some Basic Ingredients"; Hall, "Reflections on the Origins of the International Participatory Research Network"; Mcguire, "Challenges, Contradictions, and Celebrations: Attempting Participatory Research"; Rahman, "The Theoretical Standpoint of PAR."

[140] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

[141] [141] I discuss my understanding of the term 'creative tensions', which was introduced to me by Deborah Barndt, later in this introduction.

[142] Denzin and Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," 3-5.

[143] See Lather, *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*.

[144] Denzin and Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research."

[145] Barndt, "By whom and for whom?"; Fals-Borda, "Some Basic Ingredients"; Hall, "Reflections"; Mcguire, "Challenges, Contradictions, and Celebrations"; Rahman, "The Theoretical Standpoint of PAR."

[146] See Barndt, "Rooted in Place, Politics, Passion and Praxis: Decolonization, Popular Education, Community Arts, and Participatory Action Research."

[147] See Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*; Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as a Transnational Feminist Practice"; Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*; Shohat, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Moosa-Mitha, "Situating anti-oppressive theories within critical and difference-centred perspectives."

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid.

[152] Lather, *Getting Smart*.

[153] Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity;* Shohat, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*.

[154] Strega, "The view from the poststructural margins"; 211.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Lather, *Getting Smart*.

[158] This is a key premise of transnational feminism. See, again: Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*; Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as a Transnational Feminist Practice"; Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*; Shohat, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*.

[159] Lather, *Getting Smart*, 10.

[160] Ibid, 14.

[161] Freire as quoted by Macedo, "Introduction to the Anniversary Edition of Pedagogy of the Oppressed", 17.

[162] Denzin and Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research."

[163] Lorde as cited by Strega, "The view from the poststructural margins", 199.

[164] See Cole and Knowles, "Arts-informed Research."

[165] Barndt, "Touching Minds AND Hearts."

[166] Neilsen, *Provoked by Art*, 46-47.

[167] Mouffe, "The Democratic Paradox", 32.

[168] Mouffe, "Democracy, Power and 'the Political,'" 255.

[169] Marx, *18th Brumaire*, 9.

[170] Translated from Spanish in marino, *Wild Garden: Art, Education, and the Culture of Resistance*.

[171] Barndt, *VIVA! Community Arts and Popular Education in the Americas*, 11.

[172] Untitled Outline of Project, 1989; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[173] For examples, see: Hamlin and Desai, "Commiting History in Public"; Lampert, "Permission to Disrupt"; Lippard, "Anti-Amnesia"; Sholette, "Civil Disturbances NYC: Chronology of a Public Art Project."

[174] Hamlin and Desai, "Committing History in Public",78.

[175] See Hamlin and Desai, "Committing History" and Sholette, "Civil Disturbances."

[176] Hook, "Genealogy, discourse, 'effective history': Foucault and the work of critique". Also see: Williams, *Keywords.*

[177] Bishop, "The Social Turn" and *Artificial Hells*; Finkelpearl, *What We Made*; Kester, *Conversation Pieces* and *The One and the Many*; Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*; Papastergiadis, "Collaboration in Art and Society"; Vickery, "Art, Public Authorship".

[178] See Sholette, Interview with Nicholas Lampert; Hamlin and Desai, "Committing History" for examples. A full list of Sholette's essays on REPOhistory can be found in the bibliography.

[179] Sholette; Outline of Project; April 11, 1989; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 4; Folder 14; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[180] Knauer, Talk at New York Historical Society; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. See also Hamlin and Desai, "Committing History."

[181] Ibid.

[182] Sholette, interview by Dipti Desai, April 26, 2007, 6, http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/History-that-disturbs-the-Present1.pdf

[183] Ibid.

[184] Greg Sholette; Outline of project, April 11 1989; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[185] Minutes of History Project meeting of Wed., Sept. 26, 1989; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[186] "Who was REPOhistory?", REPOhistory website, last accessed June 1, 2011, www.repohistory.org/who.html.

[187] See meeting minutes from throughout 1989/1990 in The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[188] Sholette, interviewed by The Camel Group, 2008, http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/SholetteInterviewCAMELgroup.08.1.pdf.

[189] "Library Collections FAQ", MoMA, http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/library/faq_library_collection.

[190] Sholette, interview by Desai, "History that Disturbs the Present", 3. Core group members until REPOhistory disbanded included: Neill Bogan, Jim Costanzo, Tom Klem, Janet Koenig, Lisa Maya Knauer, Cynthia Liesenfeld, Chris Neville, Jayne Pagnucco, Leela Ramotar, Greg Sholette and George Spencer. Active members at various points in the REPOhistory's eleven years included: Ayishe Abraham, Todd Ayoung, Stephanie Basch, Betty-Sue Hertz, Carin Kuoni, Lucy Lippard, Kara Lynch, Alan Michelson, Mark O'Brien, Lise Prown, Megan Pugh, Tess Timoney, Sarah Vogwill, Dan Wiley and Jody Wright.

[191] Knauer, Talk at New York Historical Society; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[192] *Queer Histories* (New York, 1994) was an exception to this. The signs for *Queer Histories* were pink triangles.

[193] Videos, scripts, maps, pamphlets and some of the original signs can be found in the REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[194] Spencer. Letter to Carrie Przybilla, High museum of art Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6, Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[195] Bogan, Content and Clarity; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6, Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[196] Knauer, letter to Friends of REPOhistory; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6, Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[197] "Who was REPOhistory", REPOhistory website, last accessed June 1, 2011, http://www.repohistory.org/repo/repo_who.php3.

[198] Sholette as quoted by Hamlin and Desai, 78.

[199] Lippard, "Anti-Amnesia"; Sholette, interviewed by Lampert, 286.

[200] Lippard, "Anti-Amnesia".

[201] "Who is REPOhistory, www.repohistory.org, last accessed June 1, 2011. These projects and artists are all mentioned in archived REPOhistory notes.

[202] Knauer, Untitled Essay, 1998. The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[203] "Howling Mob Society/Gregory Sholette/Jim Constanza Presentation (NYC), Just Seeds Artists Cooperative Website, October 12, 2010, http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2010/10/howling_mob_societygregory_sho.html.

[204] Felshin, *But is it Art?*, 1995.

[205] Of course it is important to note that focusing on a collective that did receive press and that used the relative privilege of its members to garner attention, presents the danger of contributing yet again to the marginalization of less documented counter-history projects. Ironically, *REPOhistory*'s key question: *Whose Histories Are Remembered*? must be asked in this case as well. There is no doubt that the fact that *REPOhistory*'s minutes and artwork have been archived drew me to include it in my research, and that published writing by and about the collective have added depth to the analysis that follows here. Other less documented collectives have faded into obscurity due to a lack of press and/or adequate funds for documentation.

[206] Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 1991.

[207] Letter from Greg Sholette to REPOhistory members, October 1995; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 4; Folder 15; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[208] REPOhistory, "The lower Manhattan sign project : June 27, 1992-June 30, 1993," *WUSTL Digital Gateway Image Collections & Exhibitions*, accessed October 2, 2014, http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/items/show/34.

[209] See Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today*"*; Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory: The End of the Monument in Germany"; Young, *At Memory's*

Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture; Young, *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning.*

[210] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances", 286.

[211] Lippard. "Anti-Amnesia", Lower Manhattan Sign Project Catalogue, http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/REPOhistory-CAT-1992.271.pdf.

[212] *History Project Minutes, November 28, 1989; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.*

[213] In "Anti-Amnesia" Lippard says this decision was made in May 1990.

[214] This is noted throughout documents in the archive.

[215] Some images of the signs were available on the REPOhistory website (www.repohistor.org), which no longer exists. They can also be found in the Lower Manhattan Sign Project Catalogue, which is available online at http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/REPOhistory-CAT-1992.271.pdf. A number of the original signs are housed in the REPOhistory Archive at the Fales Library.

[216] REPOhistory, *Lower Manhattan Sign Project Catalogue*, 1992. Available online (see above).

[217] And, as I have discussed, artists have made faux-official street signs in many different cities.

[218] Lippard, "Anti-Amnesia", 7.

[219] Dear teacher/educator, October 1992; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 5; Folder 33; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[220] Knauer, Untitled Paper, 1998; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. Sholette also saw it this way: "History was merely a critical tool for addressing contemporary issues of social justice. That is why we focused on the historical roots of racism, sexism, gentrification, colonialism, economic inequality, and personal and sexual liberation among other issues." (Hamlin and Desai, 79).

[221] Sholette, interview by Lampert, 286.

[222] REPOhistory, LMSP Catalogue, 3.

[223] Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre Archaeology*; Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*.

[224] Fundraising Report, 1990; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 4; Folder 14; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[225] Greg's Notes for the Management and Production of Another Sign Project; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 4; Folder 15; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[226] Knauer, Untitled Paper, 1998; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[227] Untitled Letter, 1991; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 26; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[228] Ibid.

[229] REPOhistory members were interested in urban spatial politics. The ongoing gentrification of Manhattan's Lower East Side was a formative context for much of the group (many of whom had worked together in PAD/D). There was no doubt a desire to contest the city as a neutralized site.

[230] As quoted in Rothstein, *Signs of Olden Times Bring History to the Streets*, 1992.

[231] History Project. Meeting December 14, 1989 at Lucy Lippard's; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 2; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[232] Untitled Note, Date Unknown.The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 4; Folder 14; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.
[233] Ibid.

[234] History Project Minutes----, November 28, 89; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 2; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[235] Sholette, "Authenticity Squared", 8.

[236] History Project Meeting December 14, 1989 at Lucy Lippard's; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[237] Crownshaw, "The German Countermonument"; Lupu, "Memory Vanished, Absent and Confined"; Huyssen, *Present Pasts*; Young, "The Counter-Monument". "Young, *At Memory's Edge*; Young, *The Texture of Memory*.

[238] Young, "The Counter-Monument", 3.

[239] Young, "The Counter-Monument".

[240] Miles, "The Monument", 1997.

[241] Crownshaw, "The German Countermonument"; Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 16; Lupu, "Memory Vanished"; Moshenska, "Charred Churches or Iron Harvests?"; Young, "The Counter-Monument". "Young, *At Memory's Edge*; Young, *The Texture of Memory*.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Young, *The Texture of Memory*.

[244] See Czaplicka, "History, Aesthetics, and Contemporary Commemorative Practice in Berlin."

[245] Young, "The Counter-monument", 2.

[246] Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 155; Lupu, "Memory Vanished", 131.

[247] Artist Horst Hoheisel described his sculpture "Aschcrott Fountain" (Kassel 1987) as an effort to "rescue the history of this place as a wound, and as an open question" (quoted in Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 98). See also: Crownshaw, "The German Counter-monument", 213; Till, "Wounded Cities."

[248] Hoheisel as quoted by Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 100.

[249] Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory", 9.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Young, *At Memory's Edge*.

[252] Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory", 3.

[253] Lupu, "Memory Vanished"; Moshenska, "Charred Churches."

[254] Moshenska, "Charred Churches."

[255] Lupu, "Memory Vanished."
[256] Kester, "The Eyes of the Vulgar."

[257] Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 11-12.

[258] Kester, *The One and the Many*, 8.

[259] Ibid, 152.

[260] Sholette says: "For the LMSP we imagined our audience to be not only Wall Street "suits," but also the thousands of service workers and night cleaners who "invisibly" helped maintain the financial district itself. As far as actually knowing who noticed and responded to the signs I cannot really say for certain. Other than a number of anecdotes, some very amusing, we carried out no survey to determine our audience. We simply did not have the time or funds to do that" (Sholette interview by Desai, 2007).

[261] Lippard, "Anti-Amnesia."

[262] See: Melissa Tarkington, "Art Signs Challenge 'History'," *New York Newsday*, June 26 1992; Siri Huntoon, "Sign City,"' *Art News*, 91:8, October 1992; Mervyn Rothstein, "Signs of Olden Times Bring History to the Streets," *New York Times*, June 25 1992, Metro Edition; Lynette Holloway, "Art and History Prove a Volatile Mix," *New York Times*, Aug. 27 1992, Metro Edition.
[263] Lampert, "Permission to Disrupt"; Sholette in Hamlin and Desai, 79-80.

[264] Ibid.

[265] See, for example Tom Klem as quoted by Hammett, "Whose History is it Anyway?", 155.

[266] Letter from Sholette to Hertz.The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 2; Folder 27; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[267] Letter to REPOhistory Board Members from Lisa Maya Knauer,March 2, 1992; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 2; Folder 27; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[268] Mapping the Territory, April 24, 1992; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 28; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[269] Lippard, "Anti-Amnesia", 6; See Lynette Holloway, "Art and History Prove a Volatile Mix," *New York Times*, Aug. 27 1992, Metro Edition.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Knauer, Untitled Paper, 1998; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[272] Mary Antonia Thomas. Letter to Ms. Jennie Dixon. The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Series I, Box 4; Folder 14; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[273] Sholette as quoted by Hamlin and Desai, 79-80.

[274] Sholette, interview by Desai, 2007.

[275] Ibid.

[276] Mapping the Territory, April 24, 1992; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 28; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[277] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 88.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Knauer, Untitled Paper, 1998; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[280] History Project Minutes, November 7th; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 2; Folder 25; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[281] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 12.

[282] Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory", 9.

[283] Neill Bogan, The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project, April 25, 1995; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[284] See Michael Wilson, "Rematerial: Dialectical Histories", 21.

[285] Klem as quoted by Dolores Bundy, "Buttermilk Bottom is Gone but Not Forgotten", *Atlanta Voice*, November 22, 2006, http://dev.little.am/frostillustrated.com/full.php-sid=21.html.

[286] See Hammett, "Whose History".

[287] Mapping the Territory, April 24, 1992; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 28; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[288] Greg's Notes for the Management and Production of Another Sign Project. The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 4; Folder 15; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[289] See Neill Bogan ,The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project, 4/25/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[290] REPOhistory, March 1995. The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[291] Italics in original.

[292] Neill Bogan The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project as of 4/25/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[293] Ibid.

[294] See, for example: "Atlanta: The Olympic Legacy." *Financial Times* (Nov 13, 1996): i-iv, http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/docview/1036485700?accountid=15182.

[295] Bogan, The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project as of 4/25/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[296] Lisa Maya Knauer, Letter to friends of REPOhistory, July 5. 1995; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[297] Bogan, The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project as of 4/25/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[298] Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre Archaeology*; Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*.

[299] Pearson, as quoted by Cathy Turner, "Palimpsest Or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance." 378.

[300] Bo Emerson, "Uncovering Buttermilk Bottom," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1995, Arts and Entertainment Section.

[301] A number of the original *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* signs can be found in the REPOhistory Archive at the Fales Library, NYU.

[302] Images of the stenciling were available on the REPOhistory website at http://www.repohistory.org/work.html (last accessed June 1, 2011) but the website has since been removed.

[303] Bogan, The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project as of 4/25/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[304] Knauer, Untitled Paper, 1998; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[305] This photo was also on the now defunct REPOhistory website (last accessed June 1, 2011).

[306] Lisa Maya Knauer, Letter to friends of REPOhistory, July 5. 1995*; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.*

[307] Neill Bogan letter to Nicole Straus; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[308] Spencer, Letter to Carrie Pryzbilla, Curator at High Museum, Atlanta; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6, Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[309] Knauer, Untitled Essay, 1998. The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[310] Bogan, The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project as of 4/25/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[311] See the heated debates between Grant Kester and Claire Bishop in *ArtForum* 2006 as an example (Bishop's "The Social Turn" and Kester's "Another Turn"). I address these debates in depth in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

[312] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 12.

[313] Bogan, The Focus and Content of the REPOhistory Buttermilk Bottom Project as of 4/25/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[314] Sholette, "Authenticity Squared", 5.

[315] Catherine Fox, "City Site Works," *The Atlanta Journal/ The Atlanta Constitution*, September 19 1995.

[316] Lacy, *New Genre Public Art*, 1994.

[317] Cohen-Cruz,"An Introduction to Community Art and Activism"; Goldbard, New Creative Community; Knight and Schwarzman, Beginner's Guide to Community-based Arts; Lacy, New Genre Public Art; Mackey, Random Acts of culture: Reclaiming Art and Community in the 21st Century.

[318] Goldbard, *New Creative Community*, 70.

[319] Goldbard prefers the term "community cultural development" but is talking about the same thing.

[320] Goldbard, *New Creative Community*, 57.

[321] It should be noted, again, though, that this movement away from elite forms and institutions is contested and takes different forms. Some community artists feel that an emphasis on virtuosity is still important and that the artistic integrity of community art is devalued if "high art" is dropped altogether. Others argue for different definitions of virtuosity or abandon the idea altogether.

[322] Jeff Kelley as quoted by Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 108.

[323] Kelley, "Common Work", 142.

[324] See, for example: Barndt, "Touching Minds AND Hearts"; Lerman, "Feeding the Artist, Feeding the Art."

[325] See Barndt, *VIVA! Community Art and Popular Education in the Americas*; Finkelpearl, *What We Made*; Ford-Smith, "Whose Community? Whose Art?"; Goldbard, *New Creative Community*; Knight and Schwarzman, *Beginner's Guide to Community-based Arts*; Mackey, *Random Acts of Culture*.

³²⁶ See, in particular, Barndt, *VIVA! Community Art and Popular Education in the Americas*.

³²⁷ Barndt, "Naming, Making and Connecting".

³²⁸ Claire Bishop and Miwon Kwon are particularly known for their critiques of this genre. Their publications are listed in my bibliography.

³²⁹ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 6

³³⁰ Ibid, 95.

³³¹ Ibid, 151.

³³² Mary Jane Jacob as quoted by Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 111.

³³³ Kwon, 124.

³³⁴ Another notable critic of work in this field is Hal Foster (with whom Kwon studied). In "The artist as ethnographer?" (1996) Foster argues that, without considerable self-reflexivity on the part of artists, the mapping of site that is a hallmark of this genre "may confirm rather than contest the authority of the mapper over site in a way that reduces the desired exchange of dialogical fieldwork" (p. 190).

³³⁵ See, for example: Barndt, "By Whom and For Whom?"; Bishop, *Participation*; Ford-Smith, "Whose Community? Whose Art?"; Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*; Hutcheson, "The Community Artist In the Creative City: Engaged Citizen or Regeneration Bulldozer?"

³³⁶ Bishop, "The Social Turn"; *Artificial Hells*.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 44.

³³⁹ Bishop, "The Social Turn."

³⁴⁰ "Experimental Communities" by Carlos Basualdo and Reinaldo Laddaga is a good example of an attempt by scholars to distinguish between community art and new experiments in community-making by artists.

³⁴¹ Other projects in *City Site Works* also reflected this approach. In one (Lynne Yamamoto and Aresh Javadi's *Telling Stories*) artists worked with high school students to collect their family oral histories. Another (Stephanie Johnson's *We Speak)* was based on interviews with African-American women in Atlanta.

³⁴² Knauer quoted in Emerson, "Uncovering Buttermilk Bottom," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1995, Arts and Entertainment Section.

³⁴³ Knauer, Untitled Essay, 1998. The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 22; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

³⁴⁴ Bishop, "The Social Turn", 179.

³⁴⁵ Community artist Paula Jardine as quoted by Howard and Van Fossen in ""Easy to Say: Reflections on the roles of art and the artist in Canadian adaptations of the Colway Community Play form".

[346] Bogan, Content and Clarity; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 6; Folder 24; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[347] Eddie Granderson as quoted in Emerson, "Uncovering Buttermilk Bottom," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1995, Arts and Entertainment Section.

[348] See Catherine Fox, "City Site Works," *The Atlanta Journal/ The Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 19 1995.

[349] Public Comments Guestbook, September 1995*; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 10; Folder 13; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.*

[350] REPOhistory's focus on oral histories and the neighbourhood scale was amplified in *Voices of Renewal*. The six signs produced for *Voices of Renewal* were collaborations from start to finish between REPOhistory members and local individual artists. One marked the site of a displaced longtime barbershop, another expressed concern about urban displacement (the sign read "MOVE OR BE MOVED" and was placed on the artist's lawn outside her house), another yet marked the site of Atlanta's "first and last" black movie theatre.

[351] *Civil Disturbances: battles for justice in New York City* Project Description 10/29/97. The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[352] See Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist city*.

[353] Smith, *New Urban Frontier*, 43.

[354] Smith, *New Urban Frontier.*

[355] REPOhistory general meeting 11/30/95; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box II; Folder 31; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[356] Ibid.

[357] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances NYC", 278.

[358] Diller, "Introduction: Civil Disturbances- Battles for Justice in New York City."

[359] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances NYC."

[360] *Neill Bogan letter to Nicole Straus; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.)*

[361] *Civil Disturbances: Battles for justice in New York City* Project Description 10/29/97; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[362] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances NYC."

[363] Ibid.

[364] Civil Disturbances Press Release, 05/19/98; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[365] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances."

[366] David Gonzalez, "Lampposts As a Forum For Opinion," *New York Times*, May 20 1998, (Metro) pg B1.

[367] Civil Disturbances Press Release, 05/19/98; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[368] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances."

[369] Edward Copeland as quoted in David Gonzalez, "Lampposts As a Forum For Opinion," *New York Times*, May 20 1998, (Metro) pg B1.

[370] Civil Disturbances Press Release, 08/04/98; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[371] Ibid.

[372] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances."

[373] Ibid.

[374] C. Carr, "Sign Language", *Village Voice*, August 11, 1998, New York.

[375] Ibid.

[376] Ibid.

[377] Help Put Back the Sign, Wednesday October 14, 1998; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 9; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[378] Civil Disturbances Press Release, 10/13/98; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[379] Sholette, "REPOhistory's Civil Disturbances."

[380] C. Carr, "Sign Language", *Village Voice*, August 11, 1998, New York.

[381] In a 1997 letter to REPOhistory, Thorne writes: We have talked further about working with the idea of presence and absence, based on Jennys attending a meeting in which someone read a list of the names of people killed by cops in NYC, and after each name was read, the other gathered would shout, "Presente!" I am getting interested in working with the idea of "the disappeared," perhaps trying to flip it somehow as the people at the meeting have done, but also using that concept/actuality in reference to the cop whose crime is disappeared through the system of internal review and closed grand jury proceedings. So a dual remembering in the sign design: the presente of the deceased (and of the families struggles against cops and justice system), and making present the previously absented crime of the cop(s)." *From: David Thorne Re: Law Project Meeting this Thursday, 2/20/97; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 4; Folder 19; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.*

[382] David Gonzalez, "Lampposts As a Forum For Opinion," *New York Times*, May 20 1998, (Metro) pg B1.

[383] C. Carr, "Sign Language", *Village Voice*, August 11, 1998, New York.

[384] Nicolas Lampert, "Past and Present History of a REPOhistory 'Civil Disturbances' Sign", Just Seeds Artists' Cooperative website, March 17, 2008, http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2008/03/past_and_present_history_of_a.html.

[385] Ibid.

[386] See Josmar Trujillo, "Nicholas Heyward Sr. on Police Violence and the Killing of His Son by the NYPD", Truthout website, August 22, 2014, http://truth-out.org/news/item/25712-nicholas-heyward-sr-on-police-violence-civil-rights-leaders-and-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-death-of-his-son-by-the-nypd.

[387] Public Art Grant Application, 10/29/97; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[388] Civil Disturbances Draft Press Release, 03/25/98; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[389] Civil Disturbances Project Description, 29 October 1997; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[390] Klem as quoted in Lampert, "Permission to Disrupt", 528.

[391] Sholette, interview by Desai, 2007.

[392] Ibid.

[393] Civil Disturbances Draft Press Release, 03/25/98; The REPOhistory Archive; MSS 113; Box 8; Folder 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[394] Deborah Karasov, "Urban counter-images: Community activism meets public art."

[395] Karasov cites Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections, Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn's *Docklands Community Poster Project* (London, 1981-1990) and *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation* (David Avalos, Louis Hock and Elizabeth Sisco, San Diego, 1988).

[396] See Karasov, "Urban Counter Images"; Pinder, "Urban Interventions: Art, Politics and Pedagogy" and "Arts of Urban Exploration."

[397] Pearson, *Site-specific Performance*.

[398] Ibid, 40.

[399] Pruesse, *Accidental Audience: Urban Interventions by Artists*.

[400] Pearson, *Site-specific Performance*, 174.

[401] Doherty, "Public Art as Situation" and "Situations."

[402] Pruesse, *Accidental Audience*.

[403] Pearson, *Site-specific Performance*.

[404] Ibid.

405 Doherty as quoted by Pearson, *Site-specific Performance*, 8.

406 Doherty, "Public Art as Situation",11.

407 Irwin, "The Director, the Designer and the Ghost/Creative Team in Site-Specific Performance Practice", 65.

408 Pinder, "Ghostly Footsteps: Voices, Memories and Walks in the City," 16.

409 We can think of Kester's critiques of avant-garde art here.

410 Doherty, "From Site to Situation-Art in the Space of Public Time"; McLean, "Staging the Competitive and Collaborative Creative City: L'Oreal Luminato."

411 See, again, McLean, "Staging the Competitive and Collaborative Creative City."

412 Pearson, *Site-specific Performance*.

413 Levin and Solga, "Building utopia: Performance and the fantasy of urban renewal in contemporary Toronto", 46.

414 Kester, *The One and the Many,* 56.

415 Sholette, as quoted by Desai, "Commiting History in Public," 79.

416 Kester, *The One and the Many*, 28.

417 See, for example, Carr, "Sign Language", *Village Voice*, August 11, 1998, New York.

418 While Giuliani's administration was particularly repressive, it is of note that Rosalyn Deutsche published her critique of so-called 'public art' in New York, "Uneven Development," in 1988, before his time as mayor.

419 Bogan, "Power and Mastery: Negotiations in Community-based Visual Art."

420 Sholette as quoted by Desai, "Committing History in Public", 5.

421 Ibid.

422 See Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class."

423 Walkowitz and Knauer, *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation.*

424 Kester, *Conversation Pieces*,11-12.

425 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*,

426 Kuftinec, "Critical Relations in Community-Based Performance: The Artist and Writer in Conversation", 4.

427 Kester, "Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework for Littoral Art."

428 See, for example: Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*; Finkelpearl, *What We Made*; Jackson, *Social Works*; Kester, *The One and the Many*; Thompson, *Living as Form*.

[429] See Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[430] Doherty has written a number of short essays on this subject, including "Public Art as Situation: Towards an Aesthetics of the Wrong Place in Contemporary Art Practice and Commissioning"; "Curating Wrong Places…Or Where have all the Penguins Gone?"; "Situations: A combined model of research and commissioning as a method of unknowing place"; "Location, Location."

[431] Bishop notes a "common tendency for socially engaged artists to adopt a paradoxical position in which art as a category is both rejected and reclaimed: they object to their project being called art because it is also a real social process, while at the same time claiming that this whole process is art" (*Artificial Hells*, 255).

[432] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

[433] Kester, *The One and The Many,* 139.

[434] Kester, *The One and The Many*, 125.

[435] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 74.

[436] Ibid, 46.

[437] Ibid.

[438] See Doherty "Curating Wrong Places…Or Where have all the Penguins Gone?"

[439] See: Doherty, "Situations: A combined model of research and commissioning as a method of unknowing place"; Doherty, *Situation*; Doherty, Buren, Bourriaud and Domela, *Contemporary art: From studio to situation*.

[440] Doherty, "From Site to Situation-Art in the Space of Public Time," IHME Contemporary Art Festival. April 1, 2011. Helsinki Finland. Available online at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4Qn1NPUPlw.

[441] Doherty, "Situations: A combined model of research and commissioning as a method of unknowing place."

[442] Doherty, *Situation*, 7.

[443] Ibid, 18.

[444] See Kwon *One Place After Another*; Kwon, "The Wrong Place."

[445] Doherty, "Curating Wrong Places," page number unknown.

[446] See bibliography.

[447] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 164.

[448] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 41.

[449] Ibid, 55.

[450] Ibid, 54.

[451] Ibid, 166.

[452] Kwon, 160.

[453] Ibid.

[454] Kester, *The One and The Many*, 34.

[455] Ibid, 114.

[456] Ibid.

[457] Ibid.

[458] Ibid.

[459] Ibid.

[460] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 166.

[461] Ibid.

[462] Ibid.

[463] Ibid.

[464] Doherty, "Curating Wrong Places", page unknown.

[465] Ibid.

[466] Cruz, "Democratizing Urbanization and the Search for A New Civic Imagination," 62-63.

[467] Hubbard, Kitchin and Valentine, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*.

[468] Harvey, "From Space to Place and Back Again," 261.

[469] Kester, *The One and The Many*, 139.

[470] Ibid.

[471] Thompson, *Living As Form*.

[472] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 284.

[473] Ibid, 283.

[474] See Jackson, *Social Works*.

[475] Massey, "Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place."

[476] Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home."

[477] Osborne, "From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting Our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada,"148.

[478] Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

[479] For examples, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Said, "Invention, memory and place."

[480] The "scale" of the "local" is in fact imprecise- an issue I take up in the next section of this chapter.

[481] Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*,168; See also, Harvey, "From Space to Place and Back Again."

[482] See Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* and *The Inoperative Community*. Also see Young "The ideal of community and the politics of difference."

[483] See Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*.

[484] See Dirlik, "Place-based imagination: Globalism and the politics of place."

[485] See Cronon, "A place for stories: Nature, history and narrative."

[486] See Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization."

[487] Geographers Tuan, Massey and Harvey are particularly notable for their work on conceptualizing place. See Cresswell, *Place: A short Introduction*.

[488] Massey, *World City*, 15.

[489] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

[490] See Harvey, "From Space to Place and Back Again."

[491] Cresswell, *Place: A short Introduction.*

[492] See "From Space to Place and Back Again," 324.

[493] Cresswell, *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility*, 15.

[494] Massey, *A Global Sense of Place*, 147.

[495] Ibid, 152.

[496] Massey does not name Harvey, nor cite him when she uses the term "time-space compression" but it seems clear that she is responding to his ideas.

[497] Ibid, 149.

[498] Ibid, 150.

[499] Ibid, 151-152.

[500] Ibid, 154-155.

[501] Massey, "A Place Called Home?", 168.

[502] Massey, *World City*, 68.

[503] Massey, *For Space*.

[504] As David Featherstone and Joe Painter put it in their Introduction to *Spatial Politics: Essays for Doreen Massey*: "For Massey, to think spatially is never an innocent, politically neutral activitiy. Rather, ways of conceptualizing space have important effects and consequences" (3). Jeff Malpas, in "Putting space in place: philosophical topography and relational geography,"writes: "[W]hat interests Massey is less the understanding of space than the social or political consequences of any such understanding. One might thus argue that what Massey offers is not a more adequate theorization of space, but instead a theorization of spatial rhetoric and of spatial imagining as this forms the core of a spatial politics" (228).

[505] Massey, "Power Geometry and A Progressive Sense of Place," 64.

[506] Massey, *Spaces of Politics*,18.

[507] For these critiques see Kwon, *One Place After Another*; Bishop, "The Social Turn" and *Artificial Hells*.

[508] Kester, *The One and The Many*, 125.

[509] Tacita Dean in *Art Works Place*.

[510] See Foster, "The Artist as Anthropologist" in particular, for a critique of this search for 'local' knowledge.

[511] Massey, *For Space*, 9.

[512] Ibid.

[513] Massey, *World City,* 140.

[514] See Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility."

[515] See, for example, Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*; Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes."

[516] Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility," 8-9.

[517] Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility."

[518] Massey, *World City*, 66.

[519] Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility."

[520] On this point Massey cites Saskia Sassen's *Globalization and Its Discontents.*

[521] Massey, *World City*.

[522] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 166.

[523] See, also, Neil Smith's work on scale, in "Geography, Difference and the Politics of Scale."

[524] Global cities as defined by Smith (2002) are characterized by a move away from production of goods to the movement of finance. Global cities are, amongst other things, control centres of finance out of which transnational corporations are based. Keil and Brennan (2006) name Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver as Canada's global cities.

[525] Toronto Real Estate Board, "Toronto MLS Average Price", http://www.torontorealestateboard.com/market_news/housing_charts/index.htm.

[526] City of Toronto website: http://www.toronto.ca/toronto_facts/diversity.htm

[527] http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2012/02/08/toronto-2011-census.html

[528] In, *The Global Cities Reader*, Brenner and Keil note that "the case of Toronto is particularly interesting because its transformation into a global metropolitan center has occurred relatively recently" (3). In recent years, they write, Toronto "has been transformed into a global city-region, a site of apparently seamless connectivity to world markets, the global urban system, global diasporic networks and global cultural flows" (4).

[529] See Keil, "Common Sense Neoliberalism."

[530] See Toronto Community Housing, "State of Good Repair Revenue Fund Properties," http://www.torontohousing.ca/sogr_fund_properties.

[531] Massey, *A Global Sense of Place*, 149.

[532] Ibid.

[533] Hulchanski, *The Three Cities Within Toronto*.

[534] Ibid.

[535] Ibid.

[536] Ibid.

[537] See, for a recent example, "Shelter's lawyers issue legal opinion saying a rejection of controversial relocation could violate Charter rights," *Toronto Star*, August 25, 2014, http://www.thestar.com/news/city_hall/2014/08/25/shelters_lawyers_issue_legal_opinion_saying_a_rejection_of_controversial_relocation_could_violate_charter_rights.html.

[538] Shearmur as quoted by Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City: Discourses of Creativity and Priority Neighbourhoods in Toronto, Canada," 1172.

[539] Boudreau, Keil and Young, *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism*.

[540] Ibid, 35. Interestingly, because the 2010 election of Rob Ford as Toronto's mayor was largely attributed to frustration on the part of residents of the "in-between city", these issues have been paid more attention in the 2014 mayoral race.

[541] In Toronto's case, the Mississauga people.

[542] City of Toronto, *Culture Plan for the Creative City*,
www.creativecity.ca/database/files/library/2003_cultureplan_to.pdf.

[543] Byers, Jim. *Toronto's Finally A World Class City.* Toronto Star. January 28, 2011.
http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/01/28/torontos_finally_a_world_class_city.html.

[544] Philip Preville, "The Divided City: Toronto's Gilded Age Never Made it to the Suburbs," *Toronto Life*, February 13, 2014, http://www.torontolife.com/informer/features/2014/02/13/toronto-rob-ford-suburbs/.

[545] Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City: Discourses of Creativity and Priority Neighbourhoods in Toronto, Canada," 1176.

[546] Ibid.

[547] Dirlik, "Place-based imagination: Globalism and the politics of place,"156. In light of these oppositions many theorists have turned towards the term "glocal", which, according to Dirlik, "forces us to think about …a double process at work in shaping the world: the localization of the global, and the globalization of the local…" (Ibid, 158).

[548] Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City"; McLean, "Digging into the Creative City: A Feminist Critique."

[549] Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City."

[550] Dirlik, "Place-based imagination: Globalism and the politics of place."

[551] The term "postcolonial" has been critiqued for implying that colonial relations are a thing of the past (King, 1990), for reifying colonial processes even as it deconstructs them, and for drawing heavily on Western theory at the expense of Indigenous epistemologies and other thoughts/practices that are less implicated in the colonial project (see Barber, 1995). Nonetheless, "postcolonial" is a very useful term with which to describe cites which have a colonial history and in which imperial narratives continue to circulate with material effects (Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*). The term "postcolonial city" indicates both an historical and contemporary Indigenous presence and the presence of diasporic populations, many of which have arrived in the city due to imperial forces of migration. It also references the continuation of colonial relations within the city as well as the dominance of white settler "History" in current city imaging (by the municipalities themselves and by other cultural institutions).

[552] Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City,* 40.

[553] Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, 96.

[554] I am not suggesting that Art Starts' *Up and Rooted* has in fact framed Villaways as local and vernacular but am, rather, underlining the dangers of such an approach in contemporary projects like this one.

[555] Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," 128.

[556] See Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[557] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics."

[558] Kwon, *One Place After Another*; Thompson, *Living As Form*.

[559] See, for example: Basualdo and Laddaga, "Experimental Communities"; Bishop, "The Social Turn" and *Artificial Hells*; Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*; Finkelpearl, *What We Made*; Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*; Jackson, *Social Works*; Kester *Conversation Pieces* and *The One and the Many*; Lind, "The Collaborative Turn: Papastergiadis "Collaboration in Art and Society: A Global Pursuit of Democratic Dialogue"; Thompson, *Living As Form*.

[560] Ibid.

[561] See, in particular, Bishop, "The Social Turn"; Hand, "A Struggle at the Roots of the Mind: Service and Solidarity in Dialogical, Relational and Collaborative Perspectives Within Contemporary Art"; Kester, "A Critical Framework for Dialogical Practice" (124-151) in *Conversation Pieces*.

[562] See, for example, Mackey, *Random Acts of Culture*.

[563] See, for example; Howard, "Out of the Tunnel There Came Tea"; Lacy, *New Genre Public Art*; Lerman, "Feeding the Artist, Feeding the Art"; Valdez, "Painting by Listening: Participatory Community Mural Production."

[564] Ethics are emphasized by community art granting agencies as well as in literature on work in this field. See, for example, the Toronto Arts Council's "Community Arts" grant application guidelines available on the Toronto Arts Council website at http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/Media/Files/2014-Community-Arts-Project-Guidelines2.

[565] See Kwon, *One Place After Another*; Leslie and Hunt, "Securing the Neoliberal City."

[566] Ibid. See also: Ford-Smith, "Whose Community? Whose Art" ; Foster, "The Artist as Anthropologist."

[567] Bishop, "The Social Turn" and *Artificial Hells*; Ford-Smith, "Whose Community? Whose Art?"; Hand, "A Struggle at the Roots of the Mind."

[568] See Basualdo and Laddaga, "Experimental Communities" and Papastergiadis, "Collaboration in Art and Society" for examples of this.

[569] Finkelpearl, *What We Made*, 47-48.

[570] Jackson, *Social Works*, 59.

[571] See my bibliography for lists of publications by Bishop and Kester.

[572] Kim Charnley has also made this point in "Dissensus and the politics of collaborative practice."

[573] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 52.

[574] Ibid, 56.

[575] Ibid, 54.

[576] Bishop, 68.

[577] Ibid, 64.

[578] Bourriaud as quoted by Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 64.

[579] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", 70.

[580] Jackson, *Social Works*, 55-56.

[581] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 79.

[582] Bishop, "The Social Turn," 183.

[583] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 72.

[584] Ibid, 77.

[585] Ibid.

[586] Ibid, 76.

[587] Bishop, "The Social Turn," 180.

[588] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", 79.

[589] See bibliography for Mouffe's relevant publications.

[590] Jackson, *Social Works*, 56.

[591] See bibliography for a longer list of Kester's writings on this subject.

[592] Kester, *The One and The* Many, 9.

[593] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 9.

[594] See, in particular, "The Eyes of the Vulgar" in *Conversation Pieces*.

[595] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 95.

[596] Ibid, 131.

[597] Ibid, 112.

[598] Ibid.

[599] Kester, *The One and The Many*, 125.

[600] Ibid, 54.

[601] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 108.

[602] Charnley, "Dissensus and the politics of collaborative practice," 48.

[603] Heartney, "Can Art Change Lives?"

[604] Bishop, "The Social Turn," 179.

[605] For a number of relevant publications by Mouffe see the bibliography.

[606] See Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home."

[607] Phillips, "Dealing with *Difference*: A *Politics* of Ideas, or a *Politics* of Presence?"

[608] Mouffe, "Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community," 78.

[609] Democracy for radical pluralists is crucially premised on politics in the everyday, not only in official government institutions. The fact that it is conceived of as a way of being rather than as a set of structures or rules (Benhabib, "The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference), obviously, makes agonist theory appealing to some theorists of social engaged art, who are also interested in the politics of the everyday.

[610] Mouffe, "Democracy, Power and the Political," 247.

[611] Mouffe, "Democracy, Power and the Political."

[612] Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home."
[613] Honig, *Political theory and the displacement of politics*, 15. Italics added.

[614] Welch, "An ethic of solidarity and difference," 95.

[615] Welch, "An ethic of solidarity and difference."

[616] Mohanty,"Decolonization, Anticapitalist Critique, and Feminist Commitments," 7.

[617] hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women," 314.

[618] See Kwon, *One Place After Another.*

[619] Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 283.

[620] hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women," 313.

[621] Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 264.

[622] Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home," 259.

[623] Ibid.

[624] Ibid, 266.

[625] Ibid, 269.

[626] Pearce and Honig, "The Optimistic Agonist: An Interview with Bonnie Honig."

[627] As quoted by Wilson, "Autonomy, Agonism, and Activist Art: An Interview with Grant Kester,"115.

[628] Johnson as quoted by Honig, 267.

[629] Pearce and Honig, "The Optimistic Agonist: An Interview with Bonnie Honig."

[630] Bishop, "The Social Turn", 180.

[631] "Connective Aesthetics" is Suzi Gablik's term. See "Connective aesthetics: Art after individualism."

[632] This was the name of Jumblies Theatre's 2010 self-published periodical of reflections on work in the field of community art (written by Jumblies artists, interns and colleagues). Issues #1 and #2 of *Out of Place* can be purchased from the company's website at: http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/newsroom/store

[633] Jumblies Theatre, Annual Report 2009/2010, p. 2, from Jumblies website at: http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/pdf/AnnualReport0910.pdf, accessed October 16, 2014.

[634] Ruth Howard, interview by Maggie Hutcheson, Toronto, April 20, 2011.

[635] *Bridge of One Hair*, by Ruth Howard, directed by Faye Dupras, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, April 25-29, 2007.

[636] Massey, *For Space,* 67.

[637] This is a mandate for Jumblies, repeated often verbally, online, in grants etcetera.

[638] Thank you to Ruth Howard for so generously sharing these archives with me. Ruth has, understandably, been cautious about letting researchers into her artistic process and I feel honoured to have been granted access to old emails, her thinking on the process, early drafts, etcetera. I am also grateful for the stimulating conversations I was able to have with her about this project and about place-based art more generally.

[639] See Howard's "Out of the Tunnel There Came Tea" and "Is Anyone Political Anymore?" for examples of Howard's critical analyses of her own work.

[640] In fact, in 2012 I joined Jumblies Theatre's Board of Directors with the explicit caveat that I was writing about *Bridge of One Hair* for my PhD thesis and would not be acting as a board member when presenting or discussing my research.

[641] At the time of writing, however, Jumblies is *not* producing one of the large-scale productions for which they've become known but is instead focusing on cross-Canada training and mentorship.

[642] Howard, *Bridge of One Hair* script.

[643] Jumblies has become a key national player in the field to the extent that a Canadian community arts field exists at all. It is arguably still primarily premised on personal relationships rather than institutional relationships. Jumblies is working to change this, to develop the field across Canada, by hosting national symposiums, offering training workshops across the country, and organizing a cross-Canada community arts tour planned for 2015.

[644] For a longer discussion of the parameters of 'community art', see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

[645] A number of reports published by the Toronto Arts Council Foundation highlight these issues. See: "Transforming Communities Through the Arts" (2013); "Creative City: Block by Block" (2009) and; "A City Creative to its Bones" (2008) for examples.

[646] "Whose Community? Whose Art?",.

[647] MABELLEarts is a Jumblies 'offshoot' company, a community arts company that grew out of the *Bridge of One Hair* project. It has been making art in the Mabelle neighbourhood since March, 2007.

[648] Houston, quoted in Howard, "Out of the Tunnel There Came Tea", 65.

[649] Howard has spoken about the influence of Jellicoe's work on her theatre practice many times and has written about it on the Jumblies website at: http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/us/plays.html

[650] In 2000 the Colway Theatre Trust became Claque Theatre under the leadership of Jon Oram.

[651] Howard writes about this history on the Jumblies website, at: http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/us/plays.html.

[652] Ruth Howard, interview by Maggie Hutcheson, Toronto, April 20, 2011.

[653] Ibid. On the Jumblies website Howard writes that the community play form "united her interests in art, community-building and activism as never before." http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/us/history.html.

[654] Claque Theatre (formerly the Colway Theatre Trust) lists thirteen criteria for Claque community plays. These criteria are available on the Claque Theatre website at: http://www.claquetheatre.com/about/frequently-asked-questions/

[655] Ruth Howard, interview by Maggie Hutcheson, Toronto, April 20, 2011

[656] Ibid.

[657] Howard, email message to author, December 8, 2014. In other Jumblies documents the wording is slightly different. See Jumblies Theatre, Annual Report 2009/2010, p. 2, from Jumblies website at: http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/pdf/AnnualReport0910.pdf, accessed October 16, 2014.

[658] While it did not emerge out of a Jumblies project, Making Room, a community arts company based in the Parkdale neigbourhood of Toronto, is another Jumblies offshoot.

[659] Ruth Howard, interview by Maggie Hutcheson, Toronto, April 20, 2011.

[660] Ibid.

[661] Ibid.

[662] Ibid.

[663] Howard and Van Fossen, "Easy to Say: Reflections on the roles of art and the artist in Canadian adaptations of the Colway Community Play form", 2.

[664] Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents", 181.

[665] Howard and Van Fossen, "Easy to Say", 2.

[666] See Howard's "Is Anyone Political Anymore?" and "The Cultural Equivalent of Daycare Workers?" for examples of her reflections on the relationship between community artists and social change.

[667] See Barndt, *VIVA!*, 19.

[668] Howard, "Out of the Tunnel There Came Tea", 65-66.

[669] Ruth Howard, email to Vilma Vitols and Kristin Mueller-Heaslip, May 26, 2006

[670] "Jumblies History", Jumblies Theatre, http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/us/history.html

[671] Howard, interview by Hutcheson, April 20, 2011.

[672] "A Brief History", Montgomery's Inn Community Museum, last modified 2014, http://www.montgomerysinn.com/at-the-inn/history/.

[673] "Celebrating Diversity", Montgomery's Inn Community Museum, last modified 2014, http://www.montgomerysinn.com/heritage/celebrating-diversity/.

[674] Lipowski, Letter of Support for Jumblies Theatre's Application to Inter-Arts Program of the Canada Council for the Arts, November 10, 2003.

[675] Linda Pederson, Email to Ruth Howard, 2005.

[676] Jumblies Theatre, Bridge of One Hair Program, April 2007.

[677] For an online image of this mural see: http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM7QB7_Welcome_To_Historic_Village_of_Islington_Mural_Toronto_Ontario_Canada.

[678] "Islington Mosaic", Etobicoke Historical Society website, accessed June 2012, http://www.etobicokehistorical.com/Islington_Mosaic/body_islington_mosaic.html.

[679] Christopher Hume, "Nostalgia Dulls Art's Potential", *Toronto Star*, June 6, 2008, http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2008/06/06/nostalgia_dulls_arts_potential.html.

[680] For an image of the mural and this plaque see: "Welcome to Islington: Toronto's Village of Murals", Toronto's Historical Plaques, last modified 2014, http://torontoplaques.com/Pages/Welcome_to_Islington.html,

[681] Mike Lipowski, interview by Maggie Hutcheson, May 5, 2011.

[682] Ibid.

[683] Ibid.

[684] Ibid.

[685] Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, 40.

[686] Massey, "A Place Called Home?", 168.

[687] Massey, *For Space*, 130.

[688] Ibid.

[689] Massey, *For Space,* 9.

[690] Massey, *For Space,* 13.

[691] Ibid, 71*.*

[692] Arts Ambassadors Notes

[693] See Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere"; Irigarary, *This Sex Which is Not One*; Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*;
Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes"; Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* for examples of this scholarship.

[694] "Where I'm From" is a poem by George Ella Lyon, available at http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html. Lyon also developed a writing exercise through which anyone can write their own "Where I'm From" poem. Artist Loree Lawrence brought the "Where I'm From" concept and exercise to the *Bridge of One Hair* team, adapting it to fit the project.

[695] "Where I'm From" poems. 2005. *Bridge of One Hair* archives.

[696] Ibid.

[697] Alexander, "Anatomy of a Mobilization", 139.

[698] Howard, Ontario Trillium Fund Application, 2005.

[699] Art Ambassadors Notes

[700] For an example, see: LeBlanc, Dave. "It's Check-Out Time for Scarborough's Storied Motel Strip." *The Globe and Mail,* Sep 11, 2009, http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/docview/382608502?accountid=15182 (accessed October 18, 2014).

[701] Howard, interview by Hutcheson, April 20 2011.

[702] Howard, interview by Hutcheson, April 20 2011. Howard's own family history of displacement and immigration (she is Jewish, and the daughter of immigrants to Canada) may specifically contribute to this feeling, leading to her treatment of place as a site of displacements.

[703] An example is an email from Howard to the 2005 artistic team. Bridge of One Hair archives.

[704] Massey, "A place called home?"169.

[705] Massey, "A Global Sense of Place", 147.

[706] Massey, *For Space*, 158.

[707] Jumblies Theatre, *Dundas/Islington Memory Map,* created by artist Loree Lawrence

[708] Jumblies Theatre, video documentation of evaluative feedback from youth group by Maggie Hutcheson, 2006.

[709] *Bridge of One Hair* 2006 feedback notes.

[710] Ibid.

[711] Halima Warsome quoted in Interim Evaluative Summary).

[712] According to Howard, another reason these middle-class kids came to be the main performers was that they were able to sing the relatively complex music that composer Alice Ho had written for the production. As Howard herself points out, this, too, was an example of privilege taking over. Howard, email message to author, December 8, 2014.

[713] See hooks, "Homeplace: A site of Resistance" for an example.

[714] In fact, quite a few people were upset by what they saw as an emphasis on professionalism at the expense of community participation. A teacher from Islington public school, for example, whose choir had been rehearsing with Jumblies, felt her students had been slighted and questioned the partnership. A number of relationships had to be repaired.

[715] Howard, quoted in "Three Year Etobicoke Arts Project Hits Harbourfront", Etobicoke Guardian, April 19, 2007, http://www.insidetoronto.com/news-story/8036-three-year-etobicoke-arts-project-hits-harbourfront/.

[716] Massey, *For Space*, 59.

[717] Massey, *For Space*, 130.

[718] Ibid, 120.

[719] "Us", Jumblies Theatre website, http://jumbliestheatre.org/us/index.html.

[720] Bridge of One Hair Feedback 2007.

[721] Howard, "Social Investment Fund Grant Application", October 2005.

[722] Notes from Bridge of One Hair Wrap Up Meeting, May 14th, 2007

[723] See Massey, *World City*.

[724] Duke Redbird, "Old Woman". Transcribed by Ruth Howard from a CD recording in 2007.

[725] Jumblies Theatre, *Bridge of One Hair Program*, April 2007.

[726] Ibid.

[727] This poem was translated into English by Jibril's daughter, Faduma Ahmed-Alim and was included in the *Bridge of One Hair* program, April 2007. Jibril's poetry was published by Jumblies Press in 2008 and is well known in Somalia and in the Somali diaspora. See: Alim, *And Then She Said*.

[728] Howard, interview by Hutcheson, 2011.

[729] Ibid.

[730] It is worth noting that in years since *Bridge of One Hair*, Jumblies has increasingly committed itself to working with First Nations artists, addressing issues of shared existence on Aboriginal land, colonial legacies in Canada and renewal of First Nations cultural traditions by First Nations artists. This too suggests a relational approach to place, one in which each local story is tied to a rich First Nations history and to a legacy of colonial violence. Howard seems more and more committed to upending colonial projections of place, beyond a local scale. Jumblies has maintained a close working relationship with Aanmitaagzi, a community-engaged arts company started by Penny Couchie and Sid Bobb in Nipissing First Nation. Howard acts as a mentor for

Aanmitaagzi and the two companies share resources. Aanmitaagzi brought a troupe of performers down to Toronto for *Like An Old Tale* and Jumblies took performers to Nipissing First Nation in September 2014 for Aanmitaagzi's first large-scale community performance.

[731] Howard, *Bridge of One Hair* Script.

[732] Ibid.

[733] Howard, interview by Hutcheson, 2011.

[734] Ibid.

[735] Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*.

[736] "Social Investment Fund", Toronto Community Housing website, last modified 2014, http://www.torontohousing.ca/sif.

[737] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 53-53.

[738] Howard, email to author, December 8, 2014.

[739] May, "Globalization and the Politics of Place: Place and Identity in an Inner London Neighbourhood."

[740] Bridge of One Hair Feedback 2007.

[741] Rodriguez, "Change the Culture, Change the World."

[742] Personal email to Ruth Howard, April 2007.

[743] Howard, email to artistic team, 2005.

[744] Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy."

[745] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere".

[746] Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home", 22.

[747] Ibid.

[748] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 11. Dolan credits Victor Turner with introducing the term 'communitas' to performance studies. See Turner, "From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play."

[749] Ibid.

[750] Howard and Van Fossen, "Easy to Say: Reflections on the roles of art and the artist in Canadian adaptations of the Colway Community Play form", 2005.

[751] Howard, "Out of the Tunnel There Came Tea."

[752] *Bridge of One Hair* program, April 2007.

[753] Cornel West. Lecture at Howard University, 2011
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGqP7S_WO6o

[754] This demand caused an uproar and was widely discussed by the media. See, for example, "Proposed 10-per-cent cut would cost Toronto Arts Council $1-million" by Guy Dixon, The Globe and Mail, Toronto, December 2, 2011, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/proposed-10-per-cent-cut-would-cost-toronto-arts-council-1-million/article4243439/.

[755] "Close theatres, reduce snow removal: A snapshot of proposed city cuts," Brendan Kennedy, *Toronto Star*, September 13 2011, http://www.thestar.com/news/city_hall/2011/09/13/close_theatres_reduce_snow_removal_a_snapshot_of_proposed_city_cuts.html, accessed January 15, 2014

[756] "Marathon debate over budget cuts wraps up," *Toronto Star*. July 29, 2011. http://livenews.thestar.com/Event/Debate_over_city_hall_budget_cuts?Page=0

[757] This is Kester's term. See *Conversation Pieces.*

[758] The term "mushy middle" has been used quite extensively with regard to councilors who began neither as allies of Ford nor as his ideological opponents. See, for example, "The 'mushy middle' toughens up to fight Ford cuts," Elizabeth Church and Patrick White, *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, January 17, 2012, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/the-mushy-middle-toughens-up-to-fight-ford-cuts/article1360302/.

[759] See appendices for the instructions we gave them.

[760] This was conceived in collaboration with Rhubarb director/curator Laura Nanni.

[761] The sites we shared archives for were: Toronto Reference Library, Bloor Gladstone Library, Sketch, Corner Drop-In Breakfast Program (St. Stephen's Community House) and 'the Scarborough Rocket', a bus route between Don Mills Station and Scarborough Centre Station.

[762] Throughout this time we were working with no project funding save for the honoraria offered by these two festivals ($1300 total).

[763] Massey, "Neoliberalism has Hijacked Our Vocabulary."

[764] See Till, "Wounded Cities: Memory-Work and a Place-Based Ethics of Care."

[765] See Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today." Also see Chapter Three of this dissertation for a longer discussion of counter-monuments.

[766] See bibliography for a full list of Massey's publications on place. In Chapter Four I discuss Massey's scholarship on place in depth.

[767] One person performs 'maintenance duties' at the site, while the other engages in conversation. This both keeps up our performance and allows us to keep an eye on each other's safety.

[768] See Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art* for a useful taxonomy of coercion in socially engaged art.

[769] Memory Collection Notes, May 2012.

[770] Pruesse, *Accidental Audience*.

[771] Kwon, *One Place After Another*.

[772] Memory Collection Notes, July 2013.

[773] Memory Collection Notes, May 2013.

[774] Memory Collection Notes, July 2013.

[775] Ibid.

[776] Facebook message from Perram House Nurse, October 6, 2013.

[777] Personal email from ex-manager Perram House, October 6, 2013.

[778] Personal email from audience member, October 6, 2013.

[779] See McAuley, *"Site-specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator."*

[780] Till, "Wounded Cities: Memory-Work and a Place-Based Ethics of Care"; "Artistic and activist memory-work: Approaching place-based practice."

[781] Ibid.

[782] Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory: The End of the Monument in Germany," 9.

[783] McAuley, *"Site-specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator."*

[784] Ibid.

[785] Ibid. See, also: Kaye, *Site-specific art: Performance, place and documentation*; Turner, "Palimpsest Or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance."

[786] McAuley, *"Site-specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator."*

[787] Massey, "Power-geometry and A Progressive Sense of Place."

[788] See Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy."

[789] See, for example, "7 environmental charities face Canada Revenue Agency audits," by Evan Solomon and Kristen Anderson, CBC News, February 6, 2014, http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/7-environmental-charities-face-canada-revenue-agency-audits-1.2526330.

[790] In the case of the Toronto Public Library, for example, librarians whisper to us in the stacks, telling us about how the library system is suffering, even as library management have told us that they want to keep public focus on how the library system is growing. Both, in fact, may be true. The TPL continues to open new branches even as older branches experience reduced hours and staffing. The fact remains, however, that, while the union that represents library workers in Toronto invites us to events and is appreciative of our work, we do not have the goodwill of top library managers to look at how specific branches have changed or to host a public dialogue about the library.

[791] Honig, "Difference, dilemmas and the politics of home."

[792] Toronto Arts Council Foundation, "A Creative City To Its Bones: Envisioning Neighbourhood Arts Hubs: A Discussion Paper,"13.

[793] Critical Art Ensemble, *Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas*, 43.

[794] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 174.

[795] Boudreau, Keil and Young, *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism.*

[796] I have discussed this at length in Chapter Four. See, in particular, "A Global Sense of Place" and *For Space*.

[797] Memory Collection Notes, June 2013.

[798] Rao, "The Great Equalizer: The Case for Investing in Toronto Public Library."

[799] Ibid.

[800] Massey, *For Space*,155.

[801] Honig, "Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home," 259.

[802] Ibid, 258.

[803] Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility."

[804] Massey, "Globalisation: What Does it Mean for Geography?" 3. Italics in original.

[805] Honig, "Difference, dilemmas and the politics of home."

[806] Irwin, "The Director, The Designer and the Ghost/Creative Team in Site-specific Performance,"61.

[807] See Honig, "The Optimistic Agonist."

[808] See Bishop "The Social Turn" and *Artificial Hells*.

[809] Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," 190.

[810] Kwon, *One Place After Another*,138.

[811] Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," 197.

[812] It has been interesting to see who reads us this way and who does not. For, in fact, people who rely on reading peformance for survival (particularly street-involved people) immediately understand the underdog status of the DEPARTMENT, the fact that we are not officially sanctioned, while more privileged groups sometimes take longer to perceive this.

[813] Lippard, *Lure of the Local*, 286.

[814] Kwon, *One Place After Another,* 166.

[815] Karasov, "Urban counter-images: Community activism meets public art."
[816] See Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces."

[817] See Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*. See, also, Hutcheson, "Demechanizing Our Politics."

[818] Massey, "Landscape/Place/Politics: An Essay." *The Future of Landscape and the Moving Image* website. http://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/. Accessed September 14, 2014.

[819] Massey, "Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place."

[820] "Generative codes" are Paolo Freire's concept. See Barndt, "The World in a Tomato" for an in-depth discussion of generative codes.

[821] Helguera, Education for Socially Engaged Art; Bishop, Artifical Hells.

[822] I currently teach in one such program, the Community Arts Practice Certificate program at York University.

[823] Massey,
[824] Kuftinec, "*Critical Relations in Community-Based Performance: The Artist and Writer in Conversation*", 4.

[825] This expectation is, of course, implicit rather than explicit but bears out when one juxtaposes the grant amounts with the output expected to fulfill grant requirements.
[826] See Deutsche, "Uneven Development."

[827] Gadwa-Nicodemus, "Fuzzy Vibrancy."

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