

InsUrgency in Community Arts

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Statement of original authorship

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:

Acknowledgements

Love and respect...

...for all kinds of unscratchable in words intellectual, political, emotional, or the holding of my sweaty and annoying self over these years,

Lolita Fierro, Nicola Joseph, Mahmoud Yekta, Rosemary Sayigh, Laura Sassin, my parents Bernadette and Sarkis, ستديو المخيمات StudioCamps and كتبية خمسة Katibeh Khamsi peoples wherever they may find themselves in this world, my brothers and sisters and their children, Shafiq Sadeq and her peoples, Fadi Yammine (RIP), Toufiq Outhman, Taita Kaoukab, Sonia Nakad, Rihab Charida, Fraser Forsythe, Jamal el Eid, George, Layal and Jawad, Mahassen el Masri, Nour Dados and Farzin Yekta with whom I learnt how to bring teaching and political struggle together.

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Beginnings

Thought struggles with screaming flesh, throbbing holes of hunger, the buried silence of depression or that “personality in shreds:”ⁱ and with the tragedy of an ass planted on the television, watching as if they are the problems of some other time and place.

Right up until the completion of this dissertation, it remained a mystery. If I try to codify how I wrote it, the techniques and methods used for writing, I fail. Compressed, and other times combusting, sparsely there, abstractly present, seductive and ugly.ⁱⁱ A lot of the time I struggled to find the pieces of it. At other times they chased me down. As a complete piece of work, it kept itself secret until it was necessary to appear.

Take it. This is the only copy, safely spirited out. The rest have been burnt to nothing, leaving no chance for zionists, other imperialists, local businessmen and war mongers, all notorious for their mass destruction of doctoral theses, algebra homework, science projects and kindergarten paintings.

Rose Nakad

Community arts worker, youth worker and x doctoral student

Lebanon (and back to Sydney) 2009-2016

ⁱ Frantz Fanon, “Medicine and Colonialism,” *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 138.

ⁱⁱ Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain (1926),” in *Amistad 1: Writings on Black History and Culture*, ed. John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (New York: Random House, 1970), 305.

Contents

One: Beginnings and context

- 1 A dissertation of *how*, intentions
- 13 Imaginings in the time and place of practice
- 15 Preliminary statements about community arts
- 22 Establishment community arts

Two: Agitation as research method and form

- 25 Beginnings and context (2009-2016)
- 25 Agitating binaries and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*
- 30 Dissertation as form and content, experimental and changing
- 32 Notes on how agitation uses theory and practice
- 40 Working life
- 42 Becomings
- 49 How working life appears, secretive and wary

Three: Agitating theories across art and the real

- 54 Adorno and Marcuse, beginnings and context
- 60 Autonomy, art as itself and its other
- 65 Art one, the first escape
- 67 Amiri Baraka, beginnings and context
- 69 Baraka, art as material force, art as becoming
- 77 Notes on representation, the other miserable real

Four: Critiquing literature and practice

- 86 Reading the literature
- 89 Lounging in community arts literature, some questions
- 94 Dialogical salvation
- 112 Turning back from the dialogical into form and the visual (object)
- 127 Object making, form and the disappearing of resistance
- 132 Self critique, woman rush

Five:	Object becoming process/praxis
134	Art two, disrupting reception in community arts
135	Baraka's hunting, object as process
138	Introduction to the following writings
140	Adorno and Marcuse, agitating art and social praxis
151	Internal struggles, not telling the story to tell the story
157	Form as a way to train, the danger of shooting from behind
160	Internal struggles, form and content
168	Form as a way to train, agitation of sound and shadow
170	Internal struggles, the particular as collective happening
179	Some practice features of autonomous art as praxis
Six:	Practice as production, politics and training
184	Beginnings and context
188	Dismantling a piece of the canon in after school leftover time
199	After war and aesthetic Right of Return
206	Men's health project, one day photography workshop
209	Female guerrilla artist
Seven:	Form and technique disrupting technology
222	Reception as production, Fanon's radio technique
227	Practice as self determination with technique
234	Adorno, cinema and technology as capitalist tactic
240	Low tech (as collective) production
243	References
252	Community arts, community work, pedagogy

Abstract

The following is a theoretical attempt to kidnap community arts. There is no ransom or prisoner exchange because community arts has chosen to stay with a time, place and people away from humanitarian interventions, pacifying art practices and the oppressive mimicking of standardised representation.

Contrary to some of the popular ideas about socially engaged or participatory art, there will be a return to the object of art. The object is understood as a possibility, a launching ground for action rather than the artefact of reified, elitist or commercialised legacies. Focus turns away from aesthetic reception, towards critical possibilities of production within a training context. The becoming of object into existence is broken down into a series of strategies, guided by philosophical and artistic concepts taken from anti capitalist and anti colonial bodies of thought, in particular the work of Amiri Baraka and Theodor Adorno. Central to all concepts is an urgent need for art and culture to become autonomous and self determined phenomena, aesthetically disruptive of real life and its methodologies of control.

The production of art holds at its heart two major sentiments. The first is an urgent commitment to resist the tendency in community arts to re/describe the real: usually the lives of participants. This research is not satisfied with “show and tell,” and aims to offer ways to interfere with the ability of material suffering to reign supreme within the logic world of art. The second is the equally urgent commitment that training and production assert the right to, and joy of experimentation with form: form as a weapon against normalised and oppressive race, class and gender representation, and as a way to make process unique to the time, place and people of any given project. Form, speaking with the local and familiar as content, helps create a self determined process, unhindered by definitions of low art or high art, attempting to struggle for its own new and resistant specificity.

This research-as-dissertation is one of *how*, rather than *what*. It attempts to find new strategies that refresh and re/commit community arts practice to oppose and resist, away from normalised slogans of social change and transformation.

One: beginnings and context

A dissertation of *how*, intentions

We are starting to make the outline of something, though we don't know how it will end up...The only guarantee...that it's going to be better is that we are choosing an ethics...the ethics of the people, the people from below...³

At the heart of this research-as-dissertation is the urgent question of how to make community arts disrupt injustice. The challenged heart multiplies itself onto the surface of the dissertation, agitating blood to new locations on the body of community arts practice. The writings cluster around a central question of *how* community arts could imagine a refreshed commitment to the “social change” and “resistance” so much part of its discourse. They attempt to unfold principles and strategies of process, launched out of the concept of art as autonomous and disruptive: to bring imagination or collective imaginings into aesthetic battle with suffering and oppression, both for the art being made and the process of its making.

In the consideration of this central question, which becomes a series of principles and strategies, certain theoretical concepts about art and revolutionary politics were considered. The thinkers I have turned to are artists, essayists, prose and poetry writers and philosophers. All of them theorise. Sometimes their ideas connect to community arts through a revolutionary politics central to the urgency of this research, in particular anti capitalist and anti colonial thought, and at other times through more focused theorising about art. All of them are concerned with culture and art as systems of power implicated in wider forces of material oppression.

The choice of thinkers is in turn connected to history and activity I bring to the research. Much of my working life in community arts (and activism) has been in contexts where people's major concerns and points of struggle are anti racist and anti colonial. They have moved, affected and disrupted. “The rearrangement of the eye is always also a rearrangement of the ‘I’...”⁴

³ El Kilombo Intergaláctico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything. An interview with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos* (North Carolina: Paperboat Press, 2007), 19.

⁴ Aldon Lynn Nielsen, “Fugitive Fictions,” *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 325.

Art and the real are different

Several theoretical departure points will guide the strategising for community arts and help to answer the *how* of this dissertation. The first relates to the battered and beaten question about art and life. Using the work of Amiri Baraka, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, section three separates the realm of art and the realm of the material real (the social). This is a beginning and something of an antidote to their often simplistic collapsing in community arts. This does not mean giving up the real or the social in art. Even if this were possible, it would be false in a practice like community arts, which must draw its strength from the particular material conditions of its context. The separation lays a new stretch of possibility from which to agitate them back towards each other in a way that aims to honour the intention to resist and change: re-imagined social/s, using the anti social possibilities of art.

This research works from the conjecture that much of the art produced in community arts holds obsessively to the formula of re/presenting the lives of participants and/or the suffering they may live: descriptive recounting/s of “miserable reality,”⁵ often with a market flavour of human triumph and driven by various social/welfare discourses.

The reliance on personal testimony is often part of an effort to “empower” refugees through the sharing of subaltern experience with a wider audience... these stories can also be interpreted as problematic representations of victimhood. Preoccupied with personal narratives and particularly drawing on the traumatic past...⁶

Community arts as a practice for people to “tell their stories” has drained the politics of story: so that state sanctioned, safe and often mundane art is mostly produced.⁷ As it unfolds the dissertation argues that this “essentialist frame”⁸ stagnates and imprisons people, process and art into the real and its oppressive destinies, working against radical or social change intent; and working against more radical sensibilities for aesthetic production. Section three theorises a vigorous intolerance for art that retells or describes the real.

⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 1.

⁶ Michael Balfour, “Refugee Performance: Encounters With Alterity,” *Journal of Arts & Communities* 2, no. 3 (2012): 178.

⁷ See much of the art made and facilitated by CuriousWorks and Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) in Sydney, and The Arab Resource Centre for Popular Arts (ARCPA) in Beirut as examples.

⁸ Balfour, “Refugee Performance,” 179.

“Applied or participatory projects often seem to get too caught up in the conventional mode of helping a marginalized other “find a voice.”⁹ I am arguing that we who commit ourselves to community arts need to offer the people we work with refreshed strategies of production and training that create urgent and restless works, not content to “give voice” or to show and tell in endless parades of humanist art, but to make urgency a mode around which we facilitate and train as workers and artists. This research works for an art and a training process that begins with the intent to imagine the logic world of art as an opportunity to agitate and disrupt the logic of real life and its injustices.

On the other hand, not all people want to change anything. Many would prefer to go to the movies, and/or could believe that a normal state of affairs exists. I am not assuming a radicalised project-population waiting for the battle cry of community arts. The collective of ideas theorised here are not for everyone of the “community.” They are not concerned with being populist or infinitely accessible. They ask of others that they bring their desire for change with them. In fact in my experience it is usually a community within a community who become intensely engaged with this type of art making. This does not contradict the urgency to refresh the concept of resistance in community arts and for workers and artists to invite people into such a process. It must also be said that in my experience the “community” is usually more interested in such work than the artists and coordinators who populate the increasingly neoliberal sector.

Art can never end suffering and injustice. It cannot end colonial occupation, rape, or police brutality, no matter how many projects place youth on a stage (or rooftop: see section four) to dialogue with police. Art may help people survive, but art as therapy or art as the means to transform the self is not the focus here. Like the “solitary” artist the one thing we have control over in a community arts project is the kind of art we make (together). The “power of art” I want to re/theorise lies in its ability to critique and disrupt the logic of the real. To do this it must adhere to its own aesthetic realm, different to, while at the same time intensely engaged with the real and its social dimension. Art is autonomous and different, but remains humble, wary of its ability to impact on anything except its own imaginings.

⁹ Ibid, 179.

And as we discuss and train the sound effect to conceptually wind down a police siren into excruciating sonic silence, it also becomes clear that the edict (implicit in so many of the definitions invoked by community arts) that the intellectual work of experimental art is too difficult for the “community” serves the status quo of an NGO/state minded (neo) liberal humanism, while also fixing the elitism of art firmly in place.

Form

Necessary to such an art making process is a focus on experimentation with form as a central “weapon” of aesthetic making. This research centralises form (the mechanics of art making) in the conceptualising and producing of art in community arts. I am not talking about form as experiment existing for its own pleasure, a “technical formalism”¹⁰ of high tech equipment or professional skills, or formalism as a western school of art or European avant-garde.

I want to understand form as a political resistance strategy in community arts. I am interested in form as action, around which to break community arts process down into moments of politics, training/pedagogy and production: moments of political decision making in relation to the social and historical of any creative idea, and its technical, both for the art to be produced, and the discussions and methodologies of process that create it. Form becomes a way to teach, a kind of method: both for the analysing of representation and its construction/s, while also becoming a teaching strategy for production/creation. Form helps to create the conditions for people to assert agency and power over direct and indirect meanings, sensings and symbolics, from inside the very logic of the creative/training process.

Using different languages and approaches, the theoretical ideas I call upon adhere to the necessity for experimentation with form, so that art creates its own aesthetic world, and its own way of becoming in relation to the “other” world of the material real (see section five). Art’s strength, its resistance potential, lies in the play of its own specific languages, its own world of form and the way it mediates and recreates content.

Césaire's thrashing images dig into the surreal in the sense that they are sometimes wildly unrelated elements, but juxtaposed they make a new dissociation that calls forth new associations and new meaning.¹¹

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 77.

¹¹ Amiri Baraka, “Aimé Césaire,” in *Daggers and Javelins: Essays 1974-1979* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1984), 199.

The emphasis on content (as the expression of the *social* or the *real*), dominates the practice of community arts. Experimentation with form provides a way to train and produce so that content/s taken from the local and the familiar (images, sounds, smells, opinions, memories, fragments of personal stories) are reconceptualised through form into new resistant aesthetics: escaping from the hold of the real and establishment forms of representation.

Working with form helps to reconfigure the social in community arts in a more thoughtful and resistant manner. Power and agency can be expressed in learning to fully control production and representation, to create new and specific/local sensory and aesthetic understandings: another way of generating agency and upholding issues, peoples and their concerns without having to run empowerment or advocacy workshops. Form helps to move the teaching of art towards political and social struggle.

Object as praxis of production, politics and training

Section five will mark a path back to object creation, and away from the understanding of art as orchestrated engagements between human beings: this type of “relational” or “dialogical” art features heavily in the literature and practice.¹² The path does not deny the dialogical and relational, but relocates them as less didactic and literal within the process to create object. In a sense I am proposing a closing in, a stepping back from spectacle, from audience, from public dialogue or the temptation of wider community reception, in order to access the world in a new and more resistant way. It is a stepping back in order to break out from the dictates, slogans and formulas that dominate community arts and the logic of a positivist and rational real that usually dominates its contexts.

The principles and aesthetic politics of autonomous art as object are broken down into a kind of praxis. A series of what I am describing as moments (becoming intensities) of production, training/pedagogy and politics: all of them in opposition to injustice, at all times. Each particular step, or each moment is one of political decision making with aesthetics, and contains all three. Politics must remain resistant to interfere with every detail of art/representation and the way it can easily code itself into being master and making supremacist values. Production is constantly

¹² Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,” *Artforum* February (2006): 183.

challenged by the expressed intent to never reproduce the oppression of the real (and representation), but to subject its dictates to interrogation and attack. And pedagogy must remain vigorous, self reflexive, always listening and learning in order to keep up.¹³ So that for example, politics and history of the technical (angle, spotlight, colour, tone of voice, depth) are discussed and socialised back out into their material and representational existence and return (through experiment with form) as oppositional and transformed in the artwork being produced

The kind of model I reference is partly taken from my working life where the aim has been to produce objects of art: image and sound poetry, films, sound pieces, installations, radio programs. Definite objects, even if at times they were more media than art. Sound and image are the particular “art” that my research will reference. Materially speaking, there could be a room (or two, if you’re lucky): maybe in a school, a community centre on the marginalised edge of a local government area, someone’s garage or living room. There could be 20 people (or 10, if you’re lucky). Equipment usually depends on what you can get your hands on and what you can source from where: two laptops, a video camera, a still camera, a tripod (and a reflector, lights and monitor, if you’re lucky), a microphone, a digital recorder (and a small mixer and sound card, if you’re lucky). And because you’re really lucky, and working where American copyright laws can’t get you, there will be loads of software for very cheap, made workably smooth with expert cracks and patches.

Transformation

The process I have researched is not interested in transforming participants. It does not hold a desire to make participants talk or relate to anyone outside their world. It is not interested in facilitating advocacy, leadership, therapy or to improve confidence or empower. It seeks to join with others in a just space to make conceptual revolutionary art while offering and sharing discussion and technical skills needed. The focus in and around the world of that art and the process of its making could become receptacle, or catalyst for anything else that may happen.

When I began this research my focus was on the potential for community arts to transform subjectivities of the people who take part. But as it unfolded and as I began to read the writings about the practice, I stepped back from theorising any effects of community arts. My initial interest seemed too similar to much of what I think are uncritical explorations of the effect of

¹³ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, trans. Loretta Slover (England: Penguin, 1975), 36-37.

community arts, both on people and social context. While it is impossible to separate such a social practice from the myriad of effects (un-mappable) that could transpire, I felt that a focus on what it could become, or how it could transform itself was more urgent: to pull community arts back from the language and methods of welfare/NGO systems or the “non-Profit Industrial Complex,”¹⁴ public and private funding agendas, government policy, and what has largely become safe, (neo) liberal humanist practice, satisfied with social change as a series of discourses about transforming individuals, rather than systems and structures of power.

It is important to mark the difference of this research against what has become a central concern of community arts (in neoliberal times).¹⁵ Many writings make claims on behalf of those who take part, even while recognising problems of trying to assess or measure. Sometimes the voices of participants are present in some way, but most of the time their presence is invoked, but absent amidst unsubstantiated claims about transformed identities as a result of projects.¹⁶ Their alleged opinions or transformations are lost in discursive and representational dominance of research and writer (section four). Other writings are more complex, and question more critically the elusiveness of evaluating “effect,”¹⁷ while others discuss transformation of a social context or local problem.¹⁸ But even when transformation seemed to take place, I felt that the art in community arts was drained of the potential resistant strength of marginality or minority.

This research aims to actively undermine the tendency in community arts to push people onto stages and in front of cameras to tell their stories in order to transform themselves or the problems they are not responsible for. It holds no salvation in the exposure of suffering for empathetic consumption or the power of a dialogical methodology always at risk of creating false negotiation tables so that power never has to give anything up. It seeks to make community arts accountable to the suffering of the real and enormity of injustice (section four), working against a neoliberal emphasis on the self and the personal.

¹⁴ Andrea Smith, introduction to *The Revolution Will not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. Incite! Women of Colour Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), 8-9.

¹⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 14.

¹⁶ Malaika Sarco-Thomas, “Improvising in Ruyang: Community Art as Ecological Practice,” *Journal of Arts and Communities* 1, no. 1 (2009): 45-68. Tony Fegan, *Learning and Community Arts* (England: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2003). Rickie Solinger, Madeline Fox and Kayhan Irani, introduction to *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1-11.

¹⁷ Paul Clements, “The Evaluation of Community Arts Projects and the Problems With Social Impact Methodology,” *The International Journal of Art & Design Education* 26, no. 3 (2007): 325-35.

¹⁸ Wendy Walters, “Turning the Neighborhood Inside Out: Imagining a New Detroit in Tyree Guyton’s Heidelberg Project.” *TDR* 45, no. 4 (2001): 64-93.

When participants appear in the practice writings of this dissertation I have been painfully aware to avoid a synthesising into claims about their identities and subjectivities. For now possible transformations of people will be left alone and will not be assessed, even for the next funding round or collection of statistics. It is not the business of this research to pry into transformations of the characters appearing in its narratives. They are active and exert agency within my imaginings of community arts, but their personal business (including their names) is their own.

For now, the aim is to step back into preproduction or the planning, design and preparation of what we the workers/trainers offer from the power side of a process: to imagine how the practice can transform itself, before offering itself for the transformation of others. As it critiques claims of transformation/change, section four will define the need to focus in on aesthetic battle against the real, with imagination as social and political struggle.

Section five continues by embedding aesthetic struggle into the very mechanics of project and its methodologies. A project (or workshop) and the art it produces, becomes the actual time and place of aesthetically transforming the real, rather than understanding itself as part of wider strategies. This marks another difference of this research from much of the writings on community arts, which often locate the role and impact of projects in wider development strategies, usually sponsored and administered by state institutions or “funding buddies.”¹⁹

Suspending reception

Necessary is a beginning with art as phenomena to be produced, rather than desired or aesthetically contemplated and experienced. I am advocating that concerns of reception (or spectatorship) be put aside for a focus on production. The idea is not to erase communicative desires of art. This would be impossible. Rather it is to argue for a focus on the time and place of the happening, against the burden of outside forces that weigh on the art making process in community arts (section five), including whether people will “understand” or “relate” to the work. Art exists to be produced: it maintains its autonomous and disruptive subjectivity (its own sense, rather than a “common sense” of the real), but surrenders to community arts.

¹⁹ Borrowed from a colleague/comrade.

Art as reified artefact in western tradition is challenged through collective and resistant production: careful and detailed crafting to become the object into existence. Inside this process of production, politics and pedagogy, the local council, community organisation, sexual health service or even the funding buddy will not be allowed to assert dominance as owner or receiver.

And if an audience is to be imagined, then decisions about who populates the audience, and the role it plays in the work become part of the critical concerns of the project. If there is pressure to show a theatre piece to audience or a film to the funders, then how, from within the process (and the art) can the power relations that may determine reception be disrupted (section five).

Quality

Perhaps the most prevalent debates in the history of community arts have been along the binaries of outcome or process, and art or the social. The idea of producing good works of art is juxtaposed against the necessity for process to be collaborative and inclusive. Quality has remained a fraught concept, often referenced against professional art, even as discussions seek to critique “quality” as elitist and exclusionary. This research agitates the binaries: working against the reification of art (which must surrender to community arts), but is also concerned that vigorous, critical process create art/object. It has separated the art/outcome from the social/process in order to agitate them back towards the realm of each other within a frame of resistance, so that the status of both (art as elite, process as paternal or patronising) is dislodged.

My work is not so much concerned with quality, as the necessity to create works that are experimental, oppositional and unique to the time, place and people of their making: even if there wasn’t enough time on the last day of a project to properly master the sound or even if the camera broke down halfway and telephone cameras had to be used instead. Technical poverty (or “low tech:” section seven) is a very different socio-political issue to quality and is a reality in community arts, especially among more independent and self determined groupings of people working away from the direct control of the state and/or NGOs.

Technology and self determination

Section seven offers self determined ways to work with technology: cameras, microphones and software/effects. This is not a new idea in community arts. It was actively present in its more radical beginnings, but has largely collapsed into uncritical approaches to access and democracy.

Transforming technology through education and access (democracy) is a huge field of study. Section seven makes no claim to understand it all, rather it takes a particular article by Frantz Fanon about the way radio became a series of techniques in revolutionary Algeria, and ideas from Adorno about the way capitalist technology dominates technique.

Self determination adds to the arsenal to make principles of autonomous art activated as praxis, drawing technique out of technology. Section seven aims to offer tentative ways to create a self determined sentiment between technology and art/art makers, so that it becomes a series of techniques (guided by experiment with form) to realise resistant moments of production: rather than a pure skill to be learnt, or assimilation to the “preset” and built in logic of technology that can easily dominate. Here, community arts maintains a healthy paranoia of technology as enemy with all its readymade samples and automatic options (that in fact make decisions), while working and training to make technology defect and become friend and comrade.

Artist/trainer and privilege

Being a trainer, teacher, artist or facilitator means occupying an instant position of power and status, also determined by the context and power structures that dominate the presence of any teaching moment. Much of the bureaucratised nature of community arts makes it very difficult to dislodge the power of the artist/facilitator. Section five questions what I think are uncritical claims about artist and privilege that do not consider the status granted to the artist as standing between the marginalised and the state/institution.

My strategies for closing in, or focusing in on the time and place of the workshop to stand against the logic of the real, are not only about content/form of art, but also entail the artist worker giving up their privilege, and finding ways to undo the status of artist and spokesperson. This resides in the way they represent a project to the “outside,” but also in its internal mechanics: for example, through the struggle to stand against bureaucratic dictates that can stifle its freedom (refusing or aesthetically sabotaging systems of evaluation and surveillance) and through disruption of capitalist modalities and hierarchies of art production and labour.

Again, these are not new sentiments in community arts. This research aims to refresh the challenge to bureaucratic and authoritarian control over projects, and offers strategies to resist the predesigned accident of running with power built into the systems we enter. My discussion

of “becomings” (section two) also marks a concern with the “transformation” of worker/artist. Becomings are self reflexive as they theorise, troubleshoot, anticipate, prepare, work hard, break rules, suffer and sweat across all stages of facilitating/animating and training with the people who give up their time so that we (and I) can be paid (or unpaid) community arts workers/researchers.

Power lives in the smallest of moments and the most mundane interactions. This research attempts to transform the status of the trainer/facilitator into one of politicised responsibility: with all the risks of being obstinate or persuasive, while trying to stay humble and aware. The writings which attempt to practice, express a tentative stepping between facilitating/teaching and asserting “objective facts.” At times they express moments of a worker challenging participants along lines of gender, race and conceptual art making. This in itself relies on the privileged status of teacher, but for me is necessary as long as a worker also remains committed to stand with the same people against power. It is part of a constant struggle to remain aware of power however it expresses itself.

In the time and place: practice writings

The conceptual and theoretical coordinates of the research come together to produce imagined trajectories of community arts sessions and the artwork or media they create. Practice writings are scattered throughout the dissertation: incomplete, flawed and perhaps impossible. “Only works that expose themselves to every risk have the chance of living on, not those that out of fear of the ephemeral cast their lot with the past.”²⁰

Practice writings are not templates for practice, but experimentations with how theorisations can be put to work: leaving theory behind, trying to become theory themselves. They attempt to become (not describe) in the time and place of a project: both in their imaginings and in their expression as writings. They are not written in the futile attempt to remember as “truth,” but struggle to create in the present of the research. They draw from memory, while trying to generate the new: “...events taken from reality and enhanced with the spirit of the thing itself.”²¹

²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 34.

²¹ Amiri Baraka, introduction to *Tales of the Out and the Gone* (New York: Akashic Books, 2007), 10.

The first practice writings of section six take heavily from memory and happen in a south west Sydney community centre, struggling to undo the racism of *To Kill a Mockingbird* during “leftover” time of state funded afterschool literacy classes. They then cross into a garage of a surviving house, or the central square of a war devastated village in south Lebanon to create sound and image poetry.

The final two pieces are more imaginings, while containing fragments of memory. These writings are most ambitious as they map an imagined trajectory of a project (beginning with recruiting) that collectively conceptualises a two shot film about a young female guerrilla artist. These “flash forwards” could be described as utopian or “you wish miss!” Perhaps they are and perhaps I do. But according to the logic of art and form that push this research along, this could be their strength. Apart from that, I believe by the time one gets to the end of their doctoral dissertation they have earned some rights. One of them could be to make or academic dictates face the kind of wind that Alexis Wright describes in *Carpentaria*.

It swirled straight through from behind those men, picking up their wish and plucking the baseball caps...flying off their heads, together with all the loose balls of spinifex flying with the dust...It picked up all the trash. All the cardboard boxes, newspapers lying about and oily rags, spirited the whole lot across the flat towards the line of hangars on fire.²²

This wind was instrumental in destroying the biggest mine in the world. It cannot be ignored. And if one understands anything about this world, the joy and respect they feel when reading such daring in *Carpentaria* (section two) will begin to activate in their own creations (even doctoral theses). This is one way that the aesthetic becomes a way of political praxis. When from within its own world and while minding its own business, it helps to instigate opposition and independence in the formal existence, or in the *how*, of other people’s lives and productions.

The writings also make clear why the researcher likes to work with young people, while often poking her nose into their business. After all one is more likely to be able to relax a little (even smoke and curse) with younger peoples, without being judged and told what to do. One can experiment with ideas and language when they find themselves with the good fortune of

²² Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (NSW: Giramondo, 2006), 411.

working with young people who are/become interested in art and resistance. As these final tales struggle for their own specific language (joy) and voice (respect), they try to be in the spirit that Amiri Baraka and his grandfather express in *Tales of the Out and Gone*.

...tales...have a literary stature...awesome presences, themselves tails, of eras and assemblages of great thoughts and feelings. What is left of what has left. What my grandfather used to call "the last part of the chicken to go over the fence."²³

Imaginings in the time and place of practice

...a call to action in a lash making brown shadow on the cheek of a young man describing the chase and sharing his tactics in outsmarting the men (and women) in uniforms with their killer dogs. Or the demands of complex lines across an elderly hand not trying to take us anywhere deep,²⁴ except to protective tunnels and indescribable moments of dough worked into bread to be shared as people went about their lives down underground defying a three year killer siege.²⁵ Next time the young man may not survive the chase.²⁶ So many don't, imprisoned, killed or maimed.²⁷ And only the women who survived yet another attempt to pacify the Palestinian revolution could agree to help in the making of the film, sharing history and knowledge about organising and coordinating as acts of strategic resistance.²⁸

The poetry of feet nimble on ledges and roof edges is image. And a scrambling of police security signals could be sound, rhythmically worked onto image so that escape becomes poetry and technology self determined. Or image cuts between a play of light and shadow created by lashes on the cheek and hands urgently pushing the image on. Sound could be disjointed breath telling the story, cutting in and out of the atmosphere recorded in the neighbourhood. But some people in the workshop have a problem with the bravado and masculinity of his retelling: that

²³ Baraka, introduction to *Tales of the Out*, 9.

²⁴ StudioCamps, *ستون وحدة زمن (Sixty Time Units)*, Short Film, 2:22, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUT6YJCNVqk&list=PLYbeNHt9LQ3TZqZcB50cAvDXQb1tsN_qh&index=34 (accessed July 25, 2016).

²⁵ Survivors of the War of the Camps (1985-1987), Lebanon, unpublished sound recordings of interviews and discussions with StudioCamps members, 2006.

²⁶ Raul Bassi and Ray Jackson, "TJ Hickey: What do Nine Years Mean?" *Green Left Weekly*, January 14, 2013, <https://www.greenleft.org.au/node/53105> (accessed July 24, 2016).

²⁷ Mike Head, "Australia: Teenagers Killed in High-Speed Police Chase Through Working Class Suburb," *World Socialist Web Site*, February 28, 2005, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2005/02/macf-f28.html> (accessed July 24, 2016).

²⁸ A Correspondent, "The War of the Camps," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 1 (1986): 194.

sometimes it seems like bullshit. Sound is further discussed and production continues, tensing breath into tones of vulnerability: working with frequency, so that tension of vulnerability as fear is made female in his confrontation with the spectre of attack on his intimate self.

Or female hands take turns kneading flour and assembling a Kalashnikov, while the sound team decides to record the teaching of pre-Nakba invocations in dialect, or an elder manually grinding coffee in traditional tune.²⁹ As the hands produce and the sound remembers, the way sound is designed as it speaks to image crafts a sense of "...past as something living, instead of using it as the material of progress..."³⁰ The grip of time unfreezes the recorded folklore from the colonial museum of the same progress that keeps Palestinians dispossessed of their Right of Return. So that the quiver of the throat that closes the film seems strange to new eyes and ears, but at the same time makes perfect new sense inside the process of that particular project or workshop.

The content that becomes mediated by form must come from the time, place and people of its making. Kalashnikovs in a film made with people who have embraced armed struggle for justice is not strange, even though establishment community development has tried to erase it from cultural production through "anti terrorism" mantras, and anti political affiliation clauses in funding applications. Urban ledges and edges are still escape routes for many people in this world, even though establishment community arts has tried to use them for dialogue, denying the concrete of security military complexes (section four).

Preliminary statements about community arts

Over the years I have witnessed many disillusioning and reactionary occurrences in modernist minded community arts, as well as mutations of it under more neoliberal or neo colonial contexts. Young refugees politely forced to sit in front of treacherous cameras and recount treks across mountains.³¹ Men democratically urged to explain their concerns to the same police force used to subdue them and forced to carry the burden of having to change racist opinions while the racists sit comfortably in the audience gazing at a half cooked theatrical show. Young women asked to bare their souls about family abuse, dislocated and removed from wider forces of

²⁹ StudioCamps, *لن أرمش (Without Blinking)*, Short Film, 5:40, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFopsD8bzFw> (accessed July 25, 2016).

³⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 25.

³¹ I was the "hired writer" for this south west Sydney project with young Iraqi refugees, run by a torture and trauma service.

gender and race oppression and later feeling exploited by the process while not being able to pinpoint why because everybody was smiling.³² Community arts becomes a tool of social control through an obsession with describing, showing and parading the lives and suffering of those involved, leaving reality firmly intact.

...“committed art” comes to mean art that is intended to change fundamental political attitudes, but often fails. “Autonomous art” comes to mean art that is not intended to change political attitudes, yet often does.³³

Researchers on art and culture in the refugee camps of “NGO-infested”³⁴ Lebanon receiving praise for their research, while back in the camp the left over camera ceased to work after two months. Folklore presentations funded by anti terrorist units of foreign embassies toured from area to area, while just a few hours away, or just across the field, unexploded cluster bomb fragments made by companies from the same country continue to murder and bar farmers from working their fields and continue to be bought and sold on international arms markets. Privilege and power is left untouched, despite claims of improvement, transformation and sometimes even resistance, while “the true horror of fascism is conjured away; it is no longer a slow end-product of the concentration of social power, but mere hazard, like an accident or crime.”³⁵

Community arts as an official practice, is protected and sheltered by the descriptive terms, “community” and the “arts,” created and circulated by institutions and their related discourse manufacture and defining and dictating the practice/s. “Art” usually gets cornered into a didactically social and functional practice, and “community” gets defined according to what is politically or socially expedient for government, project planners and funders, “... used like Pollyfilla, patching the cracks of contradiction...”³⁶

The term community arts can never represent or speak about the many collective practices that take place among peoples all over the world. There are traditional and/or independent manifestations of non bourgeois art or non elitist art making which do not recognise the

³² I was the “hired artist” for this other south west Sydney project with young Arab women, brokered by a middle-(wo)man arts organisation, a school and a local sexual health service.

³³ Lambert Zuidervart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 36.

³⁴ Borrowed from a colleague/comrade.

³⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, “Commitment,” trans. Francis McDonagh, *New Left Review* 1, no. 87-88 (1974): 81.

³⁶ David Watt, “Interrogating ‘Community’: Social Welfare Versus Cultural Democracy,” in *Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Vivienne Binns (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1991): 58.

existence of something called community development, let alone the label of community arts: and indeed may not feel the need to call cultural production “art,” or to understand objects in the (western) tradition of artefact. There are also worlds of conscious political art that happen outside bureaucratic definitions. The everyday, social or collective manifestations of art and culture are uncatchable in any term, field or body of scholarly work.

From the beginning till the end, this research remains highly suspicious of the dominance of “community arts” as an absolute and bureaucratised term, which at the same time is wide and vague, allowing “...trafficking in tales,”³⁷ “laundered aims,”³⁸ and a domination of “empathetic identification”³⁹ and “compassionate relationship”⁴⁰ over oppositional or revolutionary disruption with art.

In a sense, and sometimes using the sensory, this research attempts to refresh the oppositional sensibilities existing in the history (and present) of community arts as a field of “professional” practice, while at the same time it speaks against established practice. A preliminary discussion of English language (mostly western based) scholarly and bureaucratic understandings of the field will help to locate the kind of community arts I have struggled to research into existence.

Delineation of fields and terms

The field of community arts I write from and against, sits within a larger field of art making practices usually described as socially engaged art. Claire Bishop writes that “socially engaged” is a flawed term since all artistic and cultural practices are engaged in some way with the world around them.⁴¹ For now the term will help delineate and mark a difference between more traditional community arts and a wider field of descriptive terms (and their models of practice) that overlap and play get-to-know-you games with each other, where

³⁷ Christopher J. Colvin, “Trafficking Trauma: Intellectual Property Rights and the Political Economy of Traumatic Storytelling in South Africa,” in *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims*, eds. Rickie Solinger, Madeline Fox and Kayhan Irani (New York: Routledge, 2008), 232.

³⁸ Owen Kelly, *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (London: Comedia, 1984), 23.

³⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 25.

⁴¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 1-2.

...this interest in community takes many forms and operates under a myriad of other names: social practice, community art, applied performance, networked culture, participatory art, new genre public art, relational aesthetics, dialogic aesthetics and so on.⁴²

As I read and followed out from references, it became clear that the newer literature related to community arts was mostly mired in the relational and dialogical concerns of the art world and its “social turn,” rather than the community development against which I began this research. Except for a minority of scholars, this social turn seems to be uncritically celebrated. In *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Claire Bishop comprehensively and critically analyses this “turn” and its related practices. She writes against its reification in recent times and extends the history of relating and participating back through the last one hundred years of mainly European art movements.

In a 2009 special edition of *The Journal of Communities and the Arts*, Wyatt and colleagues offer a critical introduction about practice and ideas. One of their major concerns is to delineate between more traditional community arts and the “turn” within the art world. In *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop also delineates more traditional community arts, as she maps and analyses the British community arts movement. Wyatt and colleagues describe traditional community arts as “...less theorized, less historicized modes of practice.”⁴³ Bishop writes that the academic literature on community arts is “scanty” and mostly comprised of reports and project evaluations rather than “synthesised narrative.”⁴⁴ Citing particular texts, she notes that an exception is community theatre.⁴⁵ My experience has been similar in that the more critical and thoughtful writings I have come across have often come out of community theatre.⁴⁶

⁴² Danielle Wyatt, Lachlan MacDowall and Martin Mulligan, “Critical Introduction: The Turn to Community in the Arts,” *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5, no. 2-3 (2013): 82.

⁴³ Ibid, 85.

⁴⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 163 and 177.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 338.

⁴⁶ Sara Brady, “Welded to the Ladle: ‘Steelbound’ and Non-Radicality in Community-Based Theatre, *TDR* (1988-) 44, no.3 (2000): 51-74. David Watt and Graham Pitts, “Community Theatre as Political Activism: Some Thoughts on Practice in the Australian Context,” in *Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Vivienne Binns (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1991): 119-33. Errol Bray, *Playbuilding: A Guide for Group Creation of Plays with Young People* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1991). Amy Spiers, “Too Comfortable? Some Misgivings about the Social Turn in Contemporary Art,” *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5, no. 2-3 (2013): 131-45. Balfour, “Refugee Performance.”

While I began the research with a general knowledge about European art, in particular avant-garde movements on the left, I had not linked the “social turn” of galleries, museums and official art worlds to the practice I understood to be community arts. I knew that artists or institutions stepped out “into” communities, and that scholars and curators followed these projects with various interests, but this world was separate from the community arts I worked in, where the starting point was the concerns of people we worked with, rather than art as phenomena. This is reflected in my preference to understand myself as community artist, rather than artist.

There are overlaps between the two fields and methodologies used. There are artists that seem to move (too) freely between art worlds and authorship of projects/artworks in welfare or development contexts. And there are projects that take ideas about the relational and dialogical and apply them to a welfare context. Even though I write from more traditional community arts, my critical encounters with the literature (and its projects) will draw from both fields. This was made difficult by the fact that much of the literature does not draw distinctions between histories, aims and concerns, and tends to understand all practices under the art world terms of the relational, the dialogical and the participatory. Wyatt and colleagues discuss a “continued disconnect”⁴⁷ between the two fields, noting the dominance of the “turn” to the social as,

...theorized and historicized by discourses largely detached from the community arts tradition. At the same time, the field of community arts is itself in a state of transition from its radical activist past, to increasing professionalization and institutionalization within government and the academy.⁴⁸

Storming the Citadels (Owen Kelly) in the British context, *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras: Constructing Community Arts* (Gay Hawkins) and *Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice* (edited by Vivienne Binns) in the Australian context, map the beginnings of official community arts. They analyse practices and concerns of community arts as a movement and its departure from more radical activist beginnings. These texts are foundational in understanding the changes to community arts within the British and Australian context and the increasing professionalisation and conformity to conservative and corporate state agendas.

⁴⁷ Wyatt et al., “Critical Introduction: The Turn,” 85.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 82.

These broader or more geopolitical histories relate to a wider critical field of studies about local and global development, the rise of aid, development and the NGO as an empire and pillar of power. But it was necessary to put aside the history and geopolitics of community arts (and community development) in order to theoretically focus on the detail of practice in a way that could speak across different contexts. Having said this, it is impossible to lock the geopolitics of community arts outside the workshop, and many of my practice ideas work against its presence.

Skilling

While my central concerns with community arts have not changed, community arts as a body of practice has been repositioned. My initial concerns focused around a lack of conscious commitment to creating art that is critical, formally unique and interrogative of power structures. This has not changed. And I remain firmly opposed to slogans that “give voice” and showcase the stories of people on the margins. *Change Media* discuss the possibility of “story theft”⁴⁹ and others have called it a trafficking in trauma through a global trend towards traumatic story collection and it’s eliciting by development and research programs.⁵⁰ The tendency to make art/culture that directly and didactically tells the story of people’s lives, too easily normalises them into increasingly conservative environments of super/markets of charity/welfare, and multiculturalisms of mass consumption.

But there has also been a refreshed understanding of the particular potential possibilities of more traditional community arts. Despite all the conservative and problematic issues, I hold onto a tradition to training and “liberating” the tools of art and culture, also present in community arts. A commitment to skilling and teaching is absent in many of the depictions about projects initiated by or arising out of the art world. These are often submerged under the wide term of “participatory” and seem to be mostly about staged, direct/ed discussion and conversation, and result in spectacles or performances concerned with taking up public space and claiming the act of (staged and orchestrated) dialoguing and relating as the main point. There seems to be an almost obsessive concern with the “relational” or the “dialogical” at the expense of wider socio-political concerns of power and also at the expense of skilling and training that community arts has always held at its core.

⁴⁹ Jennifer Lyons-Reid and Carl Kuddell (Change Media), “Turn CACD on: Change Media’s Response to Current Community Art Trends,” *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5, no. 2-3 (2013): 186.

⁵⁰ Colvin, “Trafficking Trauma,” 227.

...where children and youth still living through the privations of being poor with uncertain futures could explore their worlds through creative cultural action as a normal part of learning and growing and becoming, for a quiet space on a Tuesday afternoon, sun streaming in, an experienced guide in attendance, where you could, in the community of others, spend time alone developing discipline, experiencing what it is to be creative, honing a skill, moulding ideas into expressions, pondering the big truths of your own reality...⁵¹

While I am critical of traditional community arts, I also recognise that commitment to skilling and teaching survives within this world. And I hold important and necessary the intentions of others within my “field” to retain this commitment. I locate this research as working to theorise a dedicated process of production where the artist or worker is inside a fully collaborative and pedagogical process from the beginning till the end: conceptualising, imagining and technically producing. It is a process committed to being fully collective, where “the people” are not just contributors of their stories or ideas but are fully involved in creating and producing, while training to create and produce.

At the same time this delineation between traditional community arts and the socially engaged of art worlds, has to be dealt with carefully. Making art out of the development or NGO sector does not for me “...fall under the category of doing good.”⁵² Making art means first and foremost making art. The act of “doing good” is the act of making art that disrupts and critiques: a sentiment that has largely come out of oppositional art worlds and movements rather than community arts. My research proposals are not contingent on the NGO or the community development world. But what I am proposing are ways to train and produce such art, while inside the constraints of this sector. That some of the strategies I will be discussing are in opposition to the sectors (geopolitics) we work in and despite them: the funding buddy, the local council or right under the nose of a zealous coordinator.

⁵¹ Lucy Alexander, “Of Dying and Being Born: Reflections on the Absence of Access to Creative Arts Training in the New South Africa,” in *Uncontained: Opening the Community Arts Project Archive*, eds. Heidi Grunebaum and Emile Maurice (Cape Town: Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, 2012), 44.

⁵² Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 249.

I write from within the development world, but a within that is always trying to escape: into ways that are more activist or free and as aesthetically and materially self determined as possible. Community arts, as a term and a field is a corner I begin in: hopefully by the end of the dissertation it will aesthetically become a neighbourhood uprising, a resistant ghetto but with clean water, good infrastructure and government services, free housing, trees, parks and no policemen or militia men roaming around making or encouraging violence.

Section four

Section four considers writings that describe or engage with different projects: most of which are examples of more traditional community arts, while being located in the literature as relational and dialogical. The first piece questions simplistic claims for “relational art,” popularised by Nicholas Bourriaud’s 1998 book of the same name. Margaret Meban presents a discussion about a project in Leeds, England, concerned to bring people together to talk about safety in the central park. I argue that Meban makes claims of social transformation, while not feeling the need to hold them accountable to the real. I also question literal and didactic interpretations of relating and dialoguing, and a paternalism that seems to reside in the exhilarated attachment to them in such articles.

The next example I draw from picks up the baton of the dialogical and demonstrates the way a lack of consciousness with form can result in artistic decisions that reproduce representational oppression. It uses an example of a project (and two performances) with young black and Latino peoples, in the 1990s in Oakland California, by high profile American community artist Suzanne Lacy and the discussion of her work as dialogical art making by Grant Kester. The writings also question ethical claims for the dialogical and attempt to relocate the ethical as accountability of process/art to its context of material suffering.

Both Lacy and Kester feature prominently in the writings about socially engaged art. Kester often argues that the dialogical as an aesthetic methodology is more able to stand against the elitism of the artefact and its reception. My discussion critiques the relegation of object to reception and the reliance of this framing on binary structures: process or dialogical against object or outcome, and the individuality/isolation of object against the alleged communality of the dialogical. I question the legitimacy of disappearing the object and concerns of form and discuss a new approach that agitates binary structures, rather than surrenders to, or reproduces them.

The final piece of writing with which I critically engage is by Peter Dunn and Lorraine Lessen, also well known practitioners. They describe a project in which they worked with young marginalised people in London to rework selected European paintings. With vague critiques of modern aesthetics, curiously and naturally followed by a humanist call for common ground, the project process and the artworks produced firmly maintain the elitism of European aesthetics, filling the European frame with showcasing images that didactically present the lives of young people.

Establishment community arts

Establishment community arts often takes the personal stories of vulnerable people as fertile ground and plants seeds of objectification.

Radical community arts considers these samples of people's legacies their own business, not to be paraded on global or multicultural stages of objectification.⁵³ Not fertile ground, but planes of experience out of which sensings can emerge to push thought and make art. They never have to be spoken by anyone or for anyone. They have a secret life that engines art indirectly...⁵⁴

Establishment community art ignores the revolutionary potential of form, keeping the tricks of the trade firmly in the realm of privilege, while crying participation and collaboration.

Radical community arts tries to become form itself...

Establishment community arts has already described for the funding body the outputs expected, and plans and organises for them.

Radical community arts may have already described for the funding buddy, but doesn't believe it for a second, preferring to find its own destiny...

Establishment community arts often manufactures community into a thankful bunch of people who love to stamp logos across their smiles.

Radical community arts is not harnessed and defined by unifying identity constructions of those involved. It works to become community and chooses very carefully who to thank...

Radical community arts when forced to include the logo, makes it unrecognisable in its design...

Radical community arts works to make art that even the funding buddies want to ignore...

⁵³ Toni Cade Bambara, *Those Bones are not my Child* (London: Women's Press, 2000/2001), 527.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 527.

Establishment community arts is falsely confident about claims of social change.

Radical community arts remembers it is making art. It remains humble and honest with healthy fear and a wounded wary understanding of structural power. It prefers to work in its own arena of power, where imaginings can obstruct oppression. And if material revolution comes - to which imaginings always contribute - it is always ready to postpone the project and join...

Establishment community arts believes in fun.

Radical community arts works to redefine the meaning of fun...

Establishment community arts cannot breathe without an audience, an online outlet or a distribution strategy.

Radical community art forgets about audience or reception, and surrenders itself to the conceptual, training and production process to disrupt with aesthetics...

...the muted breath of a guerrilla fighter, hidden for three days in an earthen tunnel waiting for the sign - a real sign of three consecutive swings of the branch of a tree sagging across the entrance to the tunnel. He is the camera. And we see only the strange incline of the motion and the way the moon slowly recedes so as to protect him with darkness. We hear only the sounds of the ground he is fighting to liberate.

Establishment community arts usually prefers the popular, and thinks it knows what the people want.

Radical community arts makes room for those who want to take part, making itself flexible and pliable to their needs, but also insists on focus, discipline and the hard work required...

Radical community arts could heed the BDS⁵⁵ at lunch or dinner and tries not to give the people the coke or pepsi they want. It doesn't matter who complains. The workshops are voluntary...

Radical community arts uses initiatives like the BDS to open up conversations about the poisonous nature of many products on its list. It is not ashamed to admit its motherly desire to remove the production crew from the clutches of stomach burning multinational acid addiction, even at the risk of being called bossy and even if they are delicious sometimes...

Radical community arts seeks to remember memories of refreshing, so that fresh juice from the local street seller or the lemonada made by someone's cousin uses up the catering funds...

⁵⁵ BDS National Committee (BNC), *Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS): Freedom Justice Equality*, <https://bdsmovement.net> (accessed July 24, 2016).

Establishment community arts is bloated, wallowing in grants or dreaming about wallowing.⁵⁶

Radical community arts prefers to use a technique that grandmother taught about how to squeeze a wet cloth in a backwards time stretch of the wrist, so that all it needs in the sun is a few minutes...

Radical community arts takes the money,⁵⁷ preferring not to receive grants. Because money is just money, even though sometimes you need it to pay for equipment, people's transport and a sandwich for lunch...

Establishment community arts often thinks it can impact on the power relations between the civil army of the state (police) and the young people they target.

Radical community arts laughs (with the frequency right down) at such delusion....

Establishment community arts can easily take the whole project to describe (often through personal stories) the constant violence and abuse in women's lives, strangely content to keep a cycle of description in domination, while ending with a call for strategies and change: locking change out of the logic world of art, even if unintentionally.

Radical community art feels angry with pure description and is not ashamed of its need to do something. Instead of concluding with a call for change, it begins by fast fading up the urgency to imagine what it could feel like to destroy the constant violence in women's lives. It begins with the problem and uses production/training to fight it, even while storytelling it...

Radical community arts challenges time intellectually, pedagogically and technically, not scared to only make the sound of waiting, even if it takes the whole project. It places itself with the camera and microphone...

...around the side of the house where she thought she would be very nervous, but in fact where her hands held the match with such steadfastness - waiting for the sign to set the house and all the stupid wedding presents on fire. The sign is not a "sign," or a metaphor, but the material distorted smash of the coca cola can opening in his hands outside the fridge. The match flies through the air and becomes those close yearning reds which burn-with-sound domestic violence and coca cola too.

⁵⁶ Kelly, *Community*, 105.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 30.

Two: agitation as research method and form

Beginnings and context (2009-2016)

Criticising or counterattacking one's own research concepts
Struggling to stay off news websites
Coaxing or forcing young people to school (paying the rent)
Separating good theory away from masculine false confidence
Struggling to stay on the chair and not at the protest
Understanding how the material act of writing becomes thinking
Learning how the material act of writing can become thinking
Keeping safe in a militarised zone and neighbourhood wars outside the window
Staying out of the clutches of the not-for-profit empire while being in it⁵⁸
Finding the ethics of research and the way it represents
Surviving the relentless drones of representation
Working out what is a real problem and what is patriarchy manufactured insecurity
Thoughtfully marking the work of 120 students, 6 times per semester (paying the rent)
Planning around rations of electricity cuts
Finding this dissertation outcome (object) in the singularities of research
Daydreaming with adrenalin about تحرير Tahrir

Agitating binaries and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*

The old people...drew lines in the dirt, calling people out from the shadows of complacency, *Get it straight where you belong*. People must have felt the chilly spike prodding them to arm...Otherwise they might have never known how to go to war in the way of the old people. Living in harmony in fringe camps was a policy designed by the invader's government, and implemented, wherever shacks like Angel Day's swampsides residences first began to be called a community.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Paul Kivel, "Social Service or Social Change?" in *The Revolution Will not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. Incite! Women of Colour Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), 136-45.

⁵⁹ Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (NSW: Giramondo, 2006), 102.

As I thought, wrote and read, the binary hierarchies that assert their control kept violently crashing into each other, confounding my direction. I took the crashing for confusion. Sometimes, in desperate surrender to the regime of hierarchy I tried to separate the method of this research from its content (or theory from practice, content of art from form), in an attempt to make the organisation of thought more manageable. But then many concepts I felt were important no longer had a corner to work from, evicted by reason and structure. Surrender causing a special kind of anxiety that complexity and thoroughness would be disappeared.

At other times I tried to erase the border. With an equally desperate bravado and in opposition to the regime I would try to think, read and write as if methodology and content were one. This time crashing into a lurking harmony and the happy endings I teach against in my working life. Allowing binaries to dissolve into each other seemed to make it easier to arrive at absolutes, blocking off improvised necessities that could make research and community arts vigorous, and materially sensitive to its context, in which binaries continue to wreak havoc on people's lives.

TSHEMBE: I believe in the recognition of devices as *devices* - but I also believe in the reality of those devices...So you and I may recognize the fraudulence of the device in both cases, but the fact remains that a man who has a sword run through him because he will not become a Moslem or a Christian - or who is lynched in Mississippi or Zatembe because he is black - is suffering the utter reality of that device of conquest. And it is pointless to pretend that it doesn't *exist* - merely because it is a lie...⁶⁰

At certain torturous points, I worked out that the crashing between form and content, theory and practice, methodology and research subject was a series of happenings that seemed to be pushing the research along: making complex and sometimes sabotaging the many research threads. I understood and felt these as *agitation*: a way of doing research, a method of turning binary dictatorships into resistant militant battles that do not reconcile or resolve. This was not a moment of realisation making the research easier. But while generating new questions, agitation helped unravel conceptual problems, and brought a working consciousness to the disparities and contradictions of the research. It helped organise an (precarious) internal logic.

⁶⁰ Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: An Informal Autobiography of Lorraine Hansberry* (New York: Signet, 1970), 256.

The challenge to theorise this methodology was activated by the agitations of human and earth (otherwise known as man and nature) in the novel *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright of the Waanyi nation (close to the Gulf of Carpentaria in what is today called Australia). No simplified hierarchy or harmony is possible as both sides cross the barricades of western metaphysics.⁶¹ Nature is not the enemy of human being, representing a perpetual threat (in consciousness) that needs to be conquered. From the first pages it is clear Wright will not allow (white) man's attempted pacification of nature to assert dominance in imagination (section six). Wright is also not interested in establishing harmony or synthesising into a position of peace or even coexistence. Nothing can be resolved. When there is peace or calm, it is through agitating until momentary stillness, not agreement. When there is a battle, it is definite and real, wounding and killing.

When Norm's father is hiding under a ledge watching the "cold white" murder of his parents, the wind and breeze embrace him, changing to accommodate his presence.⁶² That is why he remains alive, even though his breathing can melt away. But that doesn't mean that later, when Norm is lost at sea stubbornly refusing to admit it, the sea won't attack, driving his arrogance and masculinity crazy. He almost dies, but in this novel the death of a person can mean another way of living and the spirit people Yinbirras run to the high points as a massive storm violently floods the island Norm lands on.

Minor literature is completely different; it's cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it.⁶³

Earth and human are not constructed as unified descriptions or entities, but broken down into actions. Each has been made multitudes of intentions and sensibilities, damaged and fractured as agencies and power arrangements shift, momentary alliances are made, and at times outright war is waged. There is judgment, comfort, curiosity, seduction, competition, refuge and love.

⁶¹ The following writings take from original English language essay: Rose Nakad, "Daring in Discourse," in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Beirut: Dar el Farabi, 2013), 113-22. All works were translated into Arabic by a collective of (we) cultural workers, led by Abdul Jabbar Khamsi.

⁶² Wright, *Carpentaria*, 102.

⁶³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 17.

The battered question of man or nature is made redundant, while nature/landscape is never mythology, but also a multitude of individualised and singular locations becoming characters taking part in the present of narrative action: an island of capitalist garbage in the sea, a slither of mud through the grandest of rivers, or under a ledge where a child watches the murder of his parents. The sea is not just the sea as “we” (those who don’t know) think we know. It is the most detailed of characters: enemy spirits, fish characters, caves, bird sounds, breezes and unidentifiable holes that keep breaking down into smaller elements like a “furious machine.”⁶⁴

Past and present intermingle in the space of a page or even less: time expands into the cracks and crevices of the here-and-now, bringing with it a proliferation of images and sounds.⁶⁵

No moment of narrative action, pause or silence is still. Time and reading is forced into wandering with extended trips across physical and spiritual planes. Not for exploration or discovery, but to confront characters to live with their senses and cultural knowledge. There are long drives across landscapes (with Mozzie and his men), always changing and full of details necessary to understand later events. Agitation seems to move the narrative along, disrupting all sides: the uptown whites of Desperance who think they run the whole show and warring Aboriginal families living on different fringes of the precious town, making strategy with the intelligence and idiosyncrasies needed to survive dispossession and state imposed poverty.

The agitations of *Carpentaria* do not feel like a preproduction decision imposed on the writing. They seem to have found themselves in mediation with its content; as the Serpent of Creation asserts its presence, and unruly characters cross emotions and landscapes (sometimes while not physically moving), birds make statements, wind howls inside the head and major historical (catastrophic) events occur. It seems from here, outside its world, to be struggling for literary resistance, both in its content and form. The agitations are couched in the brutalities of colonialism and racism, while speaking with strength of cultural knowledge and legacies of survival in occupied Australia. There are people with “...ancestral creation loaded into their senses...,”⁶⁶ while breathing claypans can be felt “...right inside the marrow of your bones.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 23.

⁶⁵ Alison Ravenscroft, “Dreaming of Others: *Carpentaria* and its Critics,” *Cultural Studies Review* 16 (2010): 205.

⁶⁶ Wright, *Carpentaria*, 27.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 372.

Agitation often comes from internal or ancestral waves of thought, and other planes of life to live by, so that stilling breathe and body becomes a skill created with both past and present. "His mind fights his trembling body until he becomes still like a rock, and dirt, and ancient times, and darkness, until his breathing stops and he is invisible."⁶⁸

The agitations of *Carpentaria* do not seem burdened by a need to disprove the stereotypes of indigenous people as they circulate in settler culture. Rather they seem to create self determined moments with complex singularities of each character: human, earth, voice, whisper, sound, dead or alive, bringing them fully into the agitations that make narrative, with "...a thudding of ancestral footsteps...pounding loudly in his head..."⁶⁹ There is struggle generated by this literary platform from which Wright seems to announce the inalienable right of indigenous peoples to self deride or self love, to affect or to respond, to fight each other while defending each other. Wholeness made of a multitude: a freedom struggled for and dragged away from white gaze and established language. "Our Will, he moves lightly through the bush to the beat of the muddied and cracked dancing feet of a million ancestors."⁷⁰

Sometimes agitation is among different black characters and their different sentiments, points of view, and bodies of knowledge. Will, the brilliant militant revolutionary has been kidnapped by the security thugs of a mine in the region. It is the biggest mine in the world. Mozzie is a preacher of sorts, who gathers groups of young men from the region and travels with them in cars maintained by the discipline of bush mechanics, speaking to communities about self determination and spiritual renewal. Mozzie maintains tense and ambiguous relations with the younger Will, who has newer and more experimental ideas about resistance and the role of tradition, while also knowing how to

...melt away into countryside. In a flat stretch of claypan, Will could flatten himself out behind the clumps of yellowing grasses and become caked mud all afternoon while a search party walked all over him.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid, 102.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 164.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 161.

⁷¹ Ibid, 288.

After Will is finally caught, Mozzie and his men appear in the hills surrounding the mine, when we the reader didn't even realise they were on the way. They become freedom fighters as they rescue Will, and through guerrilla sabotage, with the help of the wind, destroy the largest mine in the world. All the revolutionaries make it out alive and moments of victory are still possible in a neoliberal world with the daring of a literature making the realities of its own choosing. It is exhilarating and ambitious, because the unimaginable destruction of a military security complex has happened. The wind is in solidarity and agitates just at the moment when the revolutionaries thought all was lost. They are watching from the hills, and they can't believe it themselves when the wind starts to join the battle. The wind does not come in their service, but chooses its own moment of action, maintaining its own agendas and desire to destroy the mine.

Dissertation as form and content, experimental and changing

Agitation expresses an attempt to find a local and relevant methodology scratching out from the content of research. Content (community arts struggling to transform the real) kept sending clandestine messages, encouraging defection. Eventually methodology (whose nom de guerre is now form), became edgy, impatient, and began to approach, looking for its own way to transform: becoming content and form. Agitation as methodology is not only a tool of this research, it also manifests in its form: ways of becoming as a body of work in all its incompleteness as it unfolds the *how* of its content.

Agitation as method and form demands that the dissertation struggle to become the very ideas it is insisting on: political, experimental and grassroots. It was difficult to write because the words - discontented with the siege that language can impose on thought - were constantly escaping, forcing me to follow, crossing passages and tunnels, where sometimes I would find them in the actual and practical of community arts or cowering under some ledge in my mind. Writing became consciously thinking (not the creation of output, presenting of results): re/working ideas, experimenting with trajectories and learning how to survive in that no-woman's land between the thought inside your head and its representation on paper.

Often one senses, as one listens...how language had to be stretched to reach out to the as yet unspoken and still unspeakable areas of experience."⁷²

⁷² Stree Shakti Sanghatana, "**The Telangana People's Struggle**," in *We Were Making History: Women and the Telangana Uprising* (India: Kali for Women, 1989), 27.

Agitation is struggle to find ways of writing that mediate content, while confined by language. The dissertation is different in each context in order to interrogate different concepts and to express itself in a form that mediates content towards resistant becoming. For example when it is in the time and place of practice, where production and training become the centre, it reserves the right to lessen the hold of academia: struggling against description and trying to become action. Searching, getting to know the terrain, working out what or who is an ally and which strategies can be used in the fight. "Like transformed women we used to change our speech and dress - all those were our techniques."⁷³

The dissertation changes in voice and appearance. Sections are sometimes fast, sometimes short. Sometimes they draw out the issue: repeat the point. Sometimes they offer a concept and withdraw. Each context calls for a new configuration of its own. Working dexterously and always ready to move when the situation arises, while at the same time attempting to establish bases from which to consolidate and continue. The dissertation crosses times and places (continents and languages) in its engagement with theory and practice, to create particular sections (or poetic manuals) of principles and strategies scattered throughout. A dissertation from which bits can be extracted, used and adapted to other people's working configurations and contexts.

Struggling to stay on the chair: September-October 2015, Beirut

The experiment is open...we're still feeling our way to practicing the only choice open to us: creativity in the Revolution and revolution in creativity. We want to heal the damage inflicted by the...trend to separate revolution from creativity...⁷⁴

Disappearing water invading the toxic air of market induced tears is an awesome site, even though it is blasted directly onto bodies from tanks.

Mist escapes from water and protestors run back to attack under its cover.

Hours of steel canisters smashing the head, toxic shock and bullets cannot chase away a sense that perhaps it's better "...to see cars burning than to dream of one day driving them."⁷⁵

⁷³ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, "Interview with **Kondapalli Koteswaramma**," in *We Were Making History: Women and the Telangana Uprising* (India: Kali for Women, 1989), 134.

⁷⁴ Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (California: University of California Press, 1985), 137.

⁷⁵ Jean Baudrillard, "The Pyres of Autumn," *New Left Review* 37 (2006): 7.

Notes on how agitation uses theory and practice

My life never gave me the chance...to listen to the radio, to read books, to take up pen and paper and write. I worked twenty-four hours in the field. In the movement I did the speaking and left, that's all. There were days when I did not even get the daily paper. Days when I was underground in the dark!...none of us wrote. Who else will write? It is because we could not write that it came to you.⁷⁶

The focus of this dissertation is the practice of community arts: theoretical as it practices. Theory and practice in this research both agitate, both intense, and both about justice. Agitation foils all attempts to separate them into hierarchical zones of otherness and struggles to instigate them both “theoretically” and “practically.” Practice and thought are separate entities, but aiming to escape from western metaphysics: broken down, layered, multiple, shifting and moving, experimenting with what is outside or different.

Even if I tell you these troubles, you can't see or feel them.⁷⁷

To agitate, it was necessary to animate the presence of practice in this theoretical dissertation, free to roam throughout, not objectified into a chapter or a “field” and certainly never to be crammed inside the pigeonholes of the community development sector. Practice insists on taking part in theorisations, but wants to adhere to intensities of collectivity and unpredictability in community arts. Wants to keep on smoking that cigarette on the corner with a group of young people while engaging in discussion about images in advertising and the way they insidiously manipulate our lives. While arguing, listening, insisting, laughing, liking or not liking each other.

“The more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it.”⁷⁸ Theory and practice operate in different zones of reality and theory is always at risk of becoming separatist and elite. Sometimes theory looks down on such activities and considers them times and spaces of pure practice or pure identity: essentialises

⁷⁶ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, “Interview with **Mallu Swarajyam**,” in *We Were Making History: Women and the Telangana Uprising* (India: Kali for Women, 1989), 251.

⁷⁷ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, “Interview with **Dudala Salamma**,” in *We Were Making History: Women and the Telangana Uprising* (India: Kali for Women, 1989), 140.

⁷⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 20.

them into a psychological self in need of charity, or salvation,⁷⁹ refusing to see that not all conversations on that street corner mean to “save” or “develop.” Some conversations within some practice, want to be as theoretical as theory can be while struggling against welfare and humanitarian discourses of power: “...true praxis capable of overturning the status quo depends on theory's refusal to yield to the oblivion in which society allows thought to ossify.”⁸⁰

If real theory is the creation of new conceptual turns and new ways of understanding life, then practice has a right to struggle for the same ambitions, for the same grandness. Practice talks up to theory and wants to challenge from its own domain and to think and make demands. It rejects the status of pure object,⁸¹ and certainly refuses unchallenging, simplistically popular or boring practice where “as long as they get their voices heard” slogans, and “love me, I’m your youth worker” egomaniacs roam free. Practice prefers to become as “...public role of the intellectual as outsider, ‘amateur,’ and disturber of the status quo.”⁸²

Practice is always present throughout this research process. Always in presence, but not always in literal action to be described as having taken place inside its borders, observed or graphed. The time and space of this bordered research process has not aimed to represent practice as it is conventionally done in “practice based research” or “action research” methodologies. Its aim was never to do the practice (outside the scholarly world) and to then reflect and represent within the research and dissertation. Time taken away, inside the stretched out isolation of a doctoral degree has been for theorising: but with both theory and practice.

My initial methodological approach involved a reading of philosophy and anti colonial literature to help guide the research. I chose certain philosophical ideas from the work of thinkers concerned with art and liberational understandings of form, to help bring militancy and urgency back to community arts. Long stretches of time were devoted to understanding tracts of theory to find concepts that could speak to the aims of the research. There was certainly exhilaration

⁷⁹ Grant Kester, “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art,” *Afterimage* 22, no. 6 (1995): 8.

⁸⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 33.

⁸¹ Here I am thinking of the times when as a youth worker I was delegated the task of bringing buses of Arab youth to “community” festivals, conferences, and museum projects. My labour, without my ideas or those of the young people I worked with was taken for granted, as was the idea that I/we should be grateful and interested in what the “thinkers” were doing, usually in our name: with little questioning of the value or affect for the community of the activities done in the funded-time of institutions we, as more established immigrants have access to.

⁸² Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), x.

and a sense of achievement when I thought I had understood the work of critical thinkers in some thorough and independent way. The moments where their work met with community arts were joyful, creating further turns in theorising. “Good theory, he might have said, looks into the barrel of a gun.”⁸³

But as these phases of research subsided, agitation would rise: a discomfort with their creeping dominance onto the research and writing. A normalised tendency to centralise the work of European thinkers began to also dominate, arising out of the academic context of the research and my western education. The theory invited to the workshops of this research is brilliant in its own right. But its western privilege is the other reason why it has led to huge (bloated) scholarly fields and a guaranteed legacy.

Agitation has called for careful reading, with impudence and scepticism: if they are European expecting racism in their shadows.⁸⁴ If they are men (and most of them are) expecting the (almost) inevitable betrayal of women and indeed at times direct attack. Reading theorists for this research has entailed a relationship of scholarly respect, but without trust. It’s important to experiment with how to live with your wits and gut feelings, even with all this book learning.

To tell you all this - all this detail - it is just at the tip of my tongue. I have survived to tell you all this - you hold the pen - it all comes from my stomach. What is the use of your holding your pen - my courage stands tall.⁸⁵

It became a political urgency to “put the theory to work,” rather than reproduce its privilege. It became a question of how to read theory in practice: or how to read theory looking for times when it is struggling to become practice. Agitation pushes the research to imagine what thought as struggle could be for community arts. To try to make thought attack: to join the real of resistance and the oppositional politics integral to my research and present in the history of

⁸³ Guyora Binder, “On Critical Legal Studies as Guerrilla Warfare,” *The Georgetown Law Journal* 76, no. 1 (1987-1988): 6.

⁸⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 225 and 240. Adorno’s observations during his time in America are often offensive in their reduction of race and ignoring of indigenous and black experience. White Americans (as opposed to new European immigrants) are “native,” while America possesses “...inherent element of peaceableness, good-naturedness, and generosity.” Elsewhere I have discussed the almost complete absence of colonialism as engine of European modernity in Adorno’s work. His writings about jazz, without critical reference to black legacy and struggle and without enough differentiation between commercial jazz and underground manifestations, have also been called racist and myopic.

⁸⁵ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, “Interview with **Dudala Salamma**,” 140.

community arts. Restlessness means that theory will not be satisfied with making resistant claims for community arts, and run the risk of using research (and thought) as a hiding place,⁸⁶ as opposed to a safe house where every guerrilla needs a place to rest.⁸⁷

Limitations: dialectic echoes of synthesis and despair

Using the work of Adorno and Marcuse makes it necessary to delineate my approach from the dialectical and to clarify ways I have drawn from their work. The critical challenges of the Frankfurt School to European progressive thought (orthodox Marxism) were seminal and helped open up freer trajectories for leftist thought. The contradictory and open movements of a negative dialectic (section three) enrich agitations and offer strategies that have helped undo the instrumentalisation of art by reason, and common sense of conventional community arts practice. But it is necessary to delineate and consider the limitations: dialectic manoeuvres are a strategy sometimes used by the agitations of this research, rather than its method.

Adorno and Marcuse belong to the “structural” period of progressive western thought, before the “post structural.” But because of their challenges to binary hierarchies, positivist social science methodologies, and reconciled identity understandings, Frankfurt School theory and Adorno’s work in particular have been described as pointing to the post structural before post structuralism.⁸⁸ “To proceed dialectically means to think in contradictions...and against that contradiction. A contradiction in reality, [the dialectic] is a contradiction against reality.”⁸⁹

Thought and art must step carefully and critically for the realities they desire as long as real injustice continues. Both Adorno and Marcuse uphold the problem of false reconciliation, and the necessary disruption to the real that autonomous works must demonstrate. Refusing reconciliation means art not only exposes society and suffering, but also its own “belonging” to the real. This constant critical attack on a false harmony between thought/art and the social meets with my ideas for community arts and a wariness of theoretical false harmony.

⁸⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 114.

⁸⁷ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, “Interview with **Chakilam Lalithamma**,” in *We Were Making History: Women and the Telangana Uprising* (India: Kali for Women, 1989), 216.

⁸⁸ Robert W. Witkin, “Why did Adorno ‘Hate’ Jazz?” *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (2000): 147-48.

⁸⁹ Lambert Zuidervaat, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 51.

But there are limits to the “post” in the work of Adorno and the observation of a contradiction “against reality,” while it stands against injustice, runs the risk of assuming a “normal,” non contradictory truth, or an absolute truth of how reality should be. The negativity of method proposed for in artwork and theory may point to a lie of reconciliation and its impossibility in an unjust world, but does not ultimately deny its status as desired. In a critical article about Adorno’s ir/rational opposition to jazz, Witkin locates what he describes as a utopian adherence to structuralism in Adorno’s theories in the “...the structural imperative...”⁹⁰ that guide his observations of music.

Adorno uses the very denial of identity, as a realized or accomplished moment, as a means of preserving the *ideal* of identity. The preservation of that ideal, as the governing principle of action and relationship...Unrealizable in any positive sense, it can be brought to a true realization only negatively.⁹¹

The challenge to structuralism is integral, but structuralism, the child of reason and rationality is still maintained as an ideal.⁹² My attraction to the intensity and hard core aspects of Adorno’s theories was also exasperated by the lingering dialectic adherence to the binaries that dominate thought and life.

My understanding of agitation is also not as organised and relational as dialectical methodology. The concepts of this research do not so much move dialectically, rather they reverb across: crash into each other or call back or forward, sometimes dialectically. And while I offer detailed strategies for art work produced and trained in community arts, the coherent rebuilding of another community arts practice is not my aim: rather I research for the theoretical disruption of what exists and for a series of revolutionary principles for how community arts could struggle against injustice, while in opposition to the humanism and methodologies of reason that dominate the field. Agitation is different to a negative dialectic: it aims to be pure struggle without a unifying of what is possible and what is hoped for. “A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Witkin, “Why did Adorno,” 148.

⁹¹ Ibid, 149.

⁹² Ibid, 148.

⁹³ Brian Massumi, “Pleasures of Philosophy,” foreword to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xii.

I have used the work of Deleuze and Guattari, as more post structural in their theorising, to help flesh out and understand this methodology. Their work has somewhat “invisibly” influenced the research, and helps maintain contradictory points of attack. In Deleuze and Guattari’s work there are becomings and ways of imagining outside binaries and rereading/s of the historical and the social: away from the un/conscious split (and its hold over welfare sectors), the progressive and linear and the concept of identity as a whole and stagnant self. Their attempts to understand identity (object) as multitudes, movement as rhizomatic, and the minoritarian as resistant, a political way of becoming (devoid of reconciliation) have informed this method.

I read thinkers and theorists within their own worlds and not as the whole world. From Adorno’s work I have taken concepts of autonomous art to agitate the production of art in community arts. My theorising tries to locate itself in singular or individual moments of politicised production and training (a fragment of sound that disrupts its meaning in the real, or an angle struggling to liberate), in order to intervene in the everyday practice of the work. I take ideas as theory weapons and “points of attack”⁹⁴ and prefer to leave systematic and structural conclusions aside. Not only because they immediately run the risk of falseness, but also in opposition to the prevalence of absolute and over confident claims made in community arts literature that collapse into uncritical attempts to understand individual projects.

Anti colonial theory and literature, moving closer to revolution

Adorno’s work also holds a lingering expectation that enlightenment should have provided justice. There are descriptions of human behaviour in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, especially in relation to the culture industry that express the contradictory heart of Adorno’s attempts to connect human behaviour to structural forces of power and capitalism, but they also betray a brutal disappointment that further strengthens Witkin’s argument about Adorno using the very target of his thorough attack as a final ideal.

A kind of tragic pessimism runs through Adorno’s work, which at times is useful in deconstructing sanctioned truth but also degenerates into despair: crowding out a necessity to maintain struggle with thought. At times Adorno’s work reads like a descriptive lament for what

⁹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 15.

could have been, rather than a struggle to imagine the “what could be.” I found hanging threads of thought in misery, an echo of hope gone sour as if it is rational to believe that enlightenment, theorised and developed during Europe’s pillaging of the rest of the world could actually provide a just way of organising or understanding life.

The struggle of anti colonial and anti racist thinkers helps to further some of the critical attacks taken from Adorno. They pick up where Adorno falls, and centralise a necessity for struggle without despair or false hope. Adorno’s writings were within a period of demise for Europe and the murder of European Jews, while many of the other thinkers I call on were writing at times when it seemed the world for non Europeans was changing for the better. Apart from actively identifying with liberation struggles, in the work of all anti colonial and anti racist thinkers/artists called upon there is an urgency to make art/thought become change against the “miseries” of life under whiteness and colonial capitalism.

Where Adorno’s work seems to look for a resting place, Baraka’s is daring and risk taking as it expresses a necessity for art to materialise as struggle. Amiri Baraka was part of the Black Arts Movement (of the Black Power Movement), which came after many organised political and cultural struggles: the Garvey movement, the Popular Front artistic movement, the Civil Rights campaign and the tendencies and innovations of the Harlem Renaissance and black music. Fanon’s writing was during the heat of Algerian resistance where Algerians had begun to sense what victory from 180 years of French colonialism and settlement could feel like.

And way before the announcement of the “post colonial,” Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon tried to embody the after-colonial, writing with the urgent sentiment that colonialism and its representational imprisonment of colonised people would witness the end of itself. The urgent intent to create aesthetically self determined literature was a driving force of Negritude. As was the necessity to carve out of slavery and intimate dispossession a point of rally, a platform from which to speak, even if Negritude suffered from the problem of essentialising (black) identity into a male self. The urgency to imagine disruption of the real, to make art/thought a weapon is stronger than hope. Even in Césaire’s *Return to a Native Land* (1947), where a kind of despair runs through, the antidote is struggle (not hope).

In *A Dying Colonialism*, writing from inside *The Fifth Year of the Algerian Revolution*,⁹⁵ Fanon writes about, while writing against colonialism and its crumbling systems and structures in Algeria. His writings are imbued with the spirit and revolutionary intent of the growing movement. They challenge thought to consider changes in the colonised and the coloniser as resistance disrupts them both. French settlers become stuttering desperate fools, and Algerian women force family and neighbourhood to seriously respect and treasure them. The essays in *A Dying Colonialism* are constantly escaping from the descriptive, even as they describe, working for discursive instances of freedom and self determination.

...the women workers used to carry all this progressive literature in bags and travel from village to village. There were no buses and comforts...Struggling under the weight we would carry them around villages.⁹⁶

The work of prose writers, poets, playwrights and essayists Aimé Césaire, Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Cade-Bambara, Patrick Chamoiseau, Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin and Toni Morrison also help to make art/research materialise as struggle. Agitation has looked for ways to activate self determined and experimental moments in their writings in the action of community arts. It is not so much concerned with theories of literature (although at times it takes from to understand) but prefers to work from the source, from literature in its happening. Scenes, sentences, languages struggling to disrupt injustice assist theoretical concerns to unfold.

As is done in such situations, the old women on lunch breaks offered him tales, oh words of survival, stories of street smarts where the charcoal of despair watched small flames triumph over it, tales of resistance, all the ones that the slaves had forged on hot evenings so the sky wouldn't fall.⁹⁷

Fanon died before he could feel the joy of an Algeria liberated from 180 years of occupation: and after a while, the poltergeist child was born. They named him neoliberalism. After surviving systematic physical and sexual abuse at the hands of hollywood, neoliberalism became a rabid fanatic and is attempting to crawl into every hole he can find. We hope that suffocation is imminent because he cannot be saved. Neoliberalism also developed an obsession with thieving. Apart from land and water, he stood behind the bushes and watched the techniques of

⁹⁵ The original French (*L'An Cinq de la Revolution Algerienne* 1959) and translated Arabic title: first translated into English in 1965 as *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*.

⁹⁶ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, "Interview with **Kondapalli Koteswaramma**," 124.

⁹⁷ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnificent*, trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (London: Granta, 1999), 46.

collective peoples' movements, stealing every strategy he could appropriate, mutating them into the dangers Césaire warned about in *Discourse on Colonialism*.⁹⁸ "Neoliberalism...is the chaotic theory of economic chaos, the stupid exaltation of social stupidity and the catastrophic political management of catastrophe."⁹⁹

Neoliberalism added chronic lying to his list of depravities, and announced (with technical hegemonic warfare) a new world without borders, a new global community of salvation brought to us by neoliberalism and his associates (rapists). Neoliberalism has no friends. He doesn't at all care if anyone believes his lies, lacking even the decency to make them believable. They work only on the deluded. Further paraphrasing the political analysis of Durito the Beetle, Subcommandante Marcos explains that neoliberalism,

...is an ad hoc, improvised response to the crisis of the capitalist order...negotiating one day, sending in the military the next, he explained, is symptomatic of such improvisation. "Well," Durito concluded, "it turns out that 'Neoliberalism' is not a theory to confront or explain a crisis. It is the crisis itself made theory and economic doctrine...In the end, pure theoretical shit."¹⁰⁰

Working life

My community arts practice began in the context of state funded after school classes in the 1990s across three local government areas in south west Sydney: leftover bureaucratic time of two hours a day, twice a week to improve the literacy and numeracy of Arabic speaking young people from local schools (section six). At the time, they (and I) came under the descriptor NESB (non English speaking background), but now we are referred to as CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse). This first "turn" to community arts was primarily out of desperation: a sneaky trick to coax students into activities other than socialising, after their often unfulfilling days at school. I did not identify as an artist and did not have art methodologies to take to the work. I had a growing political consciousness and with this I began to use theatre, literature and music in any chaotic (crude) way to attract young people to literacy and numeracy.

⁹⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 76.

⁹⁹ Subcomandante Marcos. *Conversations with Durito: Stories of the Zapatistas and Neoliberalism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2005), 8-9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

My work in community arts “developed” and I joined with (politically conscious) colleagues and began to see myself connected to community arts in western Sydney, itself part of the wider practice known as community cultural development (CCD or community arts and cultural development).¹⁰¹ Projects initiated by community organisations of various kinds were mostly funded by the federal government’s *Australia Council for the Arts* or the state *New South Wales Ministry for the Arts* and were for the most part aimed at inclusiveness with those on the margins of society. Some of my work was with established arts organisations working in western Sydney on multimedia, theatre installation and radio projects, while other work took place with comrades in self generated projects. By the time I got to working in this field many of its more radical and activist tendencies were in the process of disappearing.

Later, here in Lebanon (and over there),¹⁰² if someone enquires about what I do and I tell them, فنون الشعبية they may ask if I am a belly dancer. Is that what I mean by community arts? They usually wouldn’t mean any disrespect, but early on I stopped using the translated-from-the English term and tried to describe what I thought I did. It was something of a rehearsal for considering the doctoral research and forced me to look in on my work from the outside, with all the strangeness of a formal term, and the strangeness of my diasporic Arabic. And while I do wish I could dance like a professional belly dancer, the necessity of making material-in-words the kind of work I wanted to do with people, also forced me to face the colonial of it and the ways I understood, as I took *it* to another place: “...any ideas coming from another part of the world cannot simply be transplanted.”¹⁰³

While some people could be insulted by the reference to a somewhat “disrespectable” past time, I learnt to welcome the strangeness. The scepticism made it easier to imagine community arts as something new, and to link it to the need to treat western terms and their associated practices as potential spies, even as I/we were trying to critically take CCD from its western context. Back in 2005 I was part of a multimedia team of workers, immigrant Australians of different kinds. In partnership with a local arts and culture NGO we initiated a train-the-trainer sound and image project concerned to make experimental political works and to train/create low cost, low tech multimedia infrastructure with young Palestinians from across the refugee camps of Lebanon.

¹⁰¹ Jennifer Lyons-Reid and Carl Kuddell (Change Media), “Turn CACD on: Change Media’s Response to Current Community Art Trends,” *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5, no.2/3 (2013): 185.

¹⁰² Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, *Ici et Ailleurs (Here and Elsewhere)*, Film, Sonimage, 1976.

¹⁰³ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, trans. Loretta Slover (England: Penguin, 1975), 17.

Later, as “participants” became comrades/colleagues, the work became expressed as the independent grassroots collective *ستديو المخيمات StudioCamps*,¹⁰⁴ creating (funded and self funded) “popular” experimental and political art, grounded in training and resourcing. Working with people from the camps has been something of a luxury: a politicised context where the fact of injustice can easily become a launching point from which to make art. Art as struggle is never an “opinion” to be explained. Militant, experimental art also makes sense in the legacy of Palestinian works by artists like Naji el Ali, Mahmoud Darwish and Ghassan Kanafani.

Becomings

...the children of holy parents, underwent, before my eyes, their incredible metamorphosis, of which the most bewildering aspect was not their budding breasts or their rounding behinds but something deeper and more subtle, in their eyes, their heat, their odor, and the inflection of their voices. Like the strangers on the Avenue, they became in the twinkling of an eye, unutterably different and fantastically *present*.¹⁰⁵

In the far corner of an alleyway is a tiny pass, easy to miss when you are not from here. Three sets of smaller feet make their way through, carrying bodies too thin and already tired, stepping out into a larger clearing on the edge of something like a main road. Not really for cars, but for fruit and vegetable carriages, a constant passing of motorcycles and mostly people on foot. The bike (which is almost not a bike) is waiting for them along a stretch of political graffiti, away from the road. It used to belong to somebody’s cousin who has now emigrated from camp and country. Left on the edge, the people leave it be: public property, public monument.

Community begins to happen, focused around the task at hand. Initial general scrutiny and two of the girls crouch down to check out the situation. There are no playgrounds, hardly any spaces to play and dismal resources that always have to be made from scratch. No privileges, no short cuts and many obstacles. There is certainly no money for a new bike. There could have been money for a new chain, but grandmother got sick and priorities are priorities. Eventually a brother or cousin will make the chain appear: but things take time.

¹⁰⁴ *ستديو المخيمات StudioCamps*, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/user/StudioCamps/about> (accessed July 25, 2016).

¹⁰⁵ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1970), 28-29.

The chain is not broken. It just can't seem to stay threaded onto the sprocket for long. Intricately working the chain to make it grasp needs dexterous fingers taking turns, experimenting with movements that disturb the air around them. The third child watches, even more intense, trying to focus while keeping still. When you think about it, when they think about it, it's a bit unfair. It's just a bike. They're all over the city, a few kids at school have them, and they certainly appear at least every hour on the television.

One girl jumps on, somewhat pushy. The others concede. They understand the urge to get on that bike, even though no one knows if the chain will hang on for a second time. Detachment is not a "psychosocial" condition to get through a difficult time;¹⁰⁶ it could be a necessary part of the way one needs to see life. Nobody gets what they want all the time.

Happening now is the glorious feel of the self-wound wind passing through the hair, travelling up the gaping excess of a sister's t-shirt and racing across the ears: the way you feel faster than everything, as the familiar transforms with motion. Sounds become something else that later you think about, trying to work out exactly what they were expressing. A way of production: messing with what's around you and maybe even yourself.

Every ride is time stretched out as far as it will go. She gets as far as the juice seller before the snap. Maybe a full twelve seconds, almost a record time. She drags the bike back to the others, while another girl runs to salvage the chain from an open gutter. They have already wiped the smile off their faces in preparation.

Becomings are about motion and movement. They are discontent with being and struggle to become towards other ways to sense and create. They do not belong to a before or after and do not scar and separate time. They are reverberations across, while within the moment make permanent traces of experience, discarding the imperative to harmonise or arrive at absolute realisations. *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin is an extended poetic essay of becomings: the kind that Deleuze and Guattari would theorise twenty years later without reference to Baldwin's experiment in fictional scholarly work. Etched through words which speak about, while speaking

¹⁰⁶ Vanessa Pupavac, "Therapeutic Governance: Psycho-Social Intervention and Traumatic Risk Management," *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (2001): 63.

with and to black America (and the white one); it is a book in struggle. Its becomings manifest in a struggle to understand dimensions of subjectivity in the midst and history of white supremacy, "...where identity is almost impossible to achieve and people are perpetually attempting to find their feet on the shifting sands of status."¹⁰⁷

The Fire Next Time concerns itself with young people and with notions of community. Written through the memory of childhood, it is a text which offers ways to write between essay and narrative, drawing self determined lines between the intimate everyday of life and the geopolitics of white supremacy. It spoke to my memories of the many other young people I have worked with, sometimes for many years as they left childhood under the regime of race, gender and class oppression "...hewing out of the mountain of white supremacy the stone of their individuality."¹⁰⁸ It also spoke to the present, but absent sentiment in this research that community arts work against community as a target group of bureaucratically defined and coercive definitions of state: to find ways to become community in its training and production.

The concept of becomings helps to understand working life as a constant disruption of the self: a way to understand subjectivity and its knowledge-world as always in change, while always in opposition. Deleuze and Guattari are well known theorists of becomings, offering step by step instructions or alternative ways to violate prescriptions and formulas imposed by capitalism and all its attendant stratifications and controls. The writings in "November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" contain such anti capitalist guides of becomings:¹⁰⁹ ways to become within the real and the social and in cultural creation.

Art is never an end in itself; it is only a tool for blazing life lines...all of those real becomings that are not produced only *in* art, and all of those active escapes that do not consist in fleeing *into* art, taking refuge in art...but instead sweep it away with them toward the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless.¹¹⁰

Agitation is also engined by becomings and the struggle to move thought and art away from prescribed methods in community arts. Becomings can happen on lines of flight, during which new weapons can be generated to be turned against the prescriptions of the state and corporate

¹⁰⁷ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 119.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 149.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 208.

systems.¹¹¹ Becomings involve multiplicities possessing configurations of slowness and speed, rest and movement. They take place along stretches of possibility. For Deleuze and Guattari they happen on planes of consistency, un-stratified and along which connections and contacts between disparate elements happen, creating the new and previously un-thought or un-sensed. These do not happen in a relational or familial sense, but according to new alliances, contagions and strategies, without signifying or symbolising. Each configuration is a struggle to become a sentiment or a new sense. "Process, which I oppose here to system or to structure, strives to capture existence in the very act of its constitution..."¹¹²

The sound of an almost coughing to death over an empty bottle of water distributed by the UN (warning people of unexploded ordinances - various cluster bombs and landmines - exploded into the ground by the IDF) is a becoming out of the possibility of a project in south Lebanon after the July War of 2006.¹¹³ The UN is swept away by a coughing fit that leaves the assemblage of health and the human body, and enters into war with the image of the bottle. It leaves the body trying to explode inside the bottle.

Becoming is not a comment on the injustice, but a freaked out coughing that becomes near death (or post death) contempt for war and the UN's role in its perpetuation. This refusal to go quietly into massacre was assisted by the actor/driver/photographer of the project, who helped create a sound that could be produced and trained to no longer (and yet again) describe the violence of colonisation and sickness of the UN, but to make such sentiments become as form and content.

Becomings in practice...

There is another small passage, the most limited of them all, leading away from where the children reign. It is only discernible to me the researcher/writer of this dissertation. It is much more rigid and straight, with defined structures. Not pockmarked with difference like the alleys of the refugee camp, but stratified by the dictates of academia and prescribed methods of

¹¹¹ Ibid, 204.

¹¹² Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 30.

¹¹³ StudioCamps, مساعداً (*Relief*), Audiovisual Poetry, 0:37, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT9Npi6aZBY&list=PLYbeNHt9LQ3TZqZcB50cAvDXQb1tsN_qh&index=14 (accessed July 25, 2016).

research. Its walls and windows are facial,¹¹⁴ defined eyes, ears and mouth for observing and extracting meaning in sanctioned ways. And they are all watching me: and me watching myself, policing myself. My walk back through this passage, the research process including the appearance of these words, has been fraught with trying to make eyes become other things.

Another foreigner walks through a refugee camp anywhere in this world: goes smilingly into a people's home, sits tritely obedient to understand. The actual walk in was a fool. As he sits it is true; that unpracticed fantasy to learn to make molotov and launch it in its own sweetly discontent neighbourhood may have been more useful than hanging around the neck of people whose loads are already heavy with the struggle of perpetual refugeeeness and poverty. The walls and windows watch the unfolding strangeness of the buffoon of community based activism.

If the face is a politics, dismantling the face is also a politics of involving real becomings, an entire becoming-clandestine. Dismantling the face is the same as breaking through the wall of the signifier and getting out of the black hole of subjectivity.¹¹⁵

Deleuze and Guattari have mixed up their colour symbolics. In the market mutilated world that *A Thousand Plateaus* takes aim at, walls of the constructed, socialised face are a supremacist model of "whitewashed stone liberation,"¹¹⁶ uniform, stale and smug. Holes (the blown up mine in *Carpentaria*) as opposed to the tunnels and passages of a refugee camp, may seem black but they are in fact obsessed with stealing light to hoard and sell back to the disinherited, or to use in representation as a means of subjugation.

And just when you think "...the great black hole where a moon ago I wanted to drown..."¹¹⁷ is a subjectivity of internalised racism, you realise that Césaire has exposed it as a myth; revealing it as the night sky, in which to fish for the still and scraping "...malevolent tongue of the night..."¹¹⁸ which still cannot be trusted because the sky licking dove of somebody else's propaganda is

¹¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 168.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 188.

¹¹⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 51.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 51.

rising towards it. "Death expires in a white pool of silence."¹¹⁹ And in a rare (or accidental) moment Horkheimer and Adorno demonstrate something of a cultural race politics. The European salvation-lie of enlightenment and its subsequent "dark horizon of myth" are "...illuminated by the sun of calculating reason, beneath whose icy rays the seeds of a new barbarism are germinating."¹²⁰

Image: In a permanent refugee camp, people are forced to settle and build structures in populated spaces. Refugee life works on and transforms walls and windows, making them faltering all the time, flexible, but also dangerous. They get regularly violently destroyed. A variety of "friendly" government permits can do it and so do bombs. In the refugee camp, windows are dark and conditions damp because the enemy has dispossessed people of sun over villages, rivers and seas. People who understand never take on the sun at noon. They never get that high and mighty.

At the border between occupied Palestine and Lebanon, there are white walls in uniform on the settler side like "...stumps skewered side by side on the flaming sword of the Sun..."¹²¹ The windows of each house a mirror of the next, pathologically reflecting each other and calculating erasure of other people's histories. One rarely sees people. The scene looks exactly like it has been dropped onto the landscape by a helicopter. On the Lebanese side, eyes can be burnt by sun and occasionally by phosphorous bombs. Each house is different. Faces look through windows all the time, sit outside them, call from them and sometimes jump through, forced to run away leaving walls and windows to absolute destruction from the other side.

Faces in the camps can never be white walls. Eyes do not glare with blank subjectivity, but often with anger and discontent, sometimes calculating reason (of surviving) and a desire for change. Subjectivity of people in camps is always being made anew with the struggle for survival.¹²² A becoming is always in process, while life has also become more and more difficult. Years later, a fig tree had to give up on figs within the arid, urbanising of a refugee camp in another city, another nation state. Sitting alone behind the back door of an NGO, Fig Tree seemed to survive by thinking extraordinary thoughts with the stretch of a branch bent to the ground, but not

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 17.

¹²⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 25.

¹²¹ Césaire, *Notebook of a Return*, 42.

¹²² Gilles Deleuze and Elias Sanbar, "The Indians of Palestine," trans. Timothy S. Murphy, *Discourse* 20, no. 3 (1998): 25.

broken: tired and coarse leaves trying to throw off dust of violent exile in the smallest of breezes. The added burdens of regular aerial bombardment or invasion, make Fig Tree's survival a momentous and revolutionary act.

Sound: In a permanent refugee camp where buildings are packed close together, sound is more dominant than the visual, escaping through cracks and pockmarks.

After the indifference toward his community based theories, he either packs himself up and leaves, or allows himself to be silenced. Windows are helpless against the breathing of real neighbourhoods and ears start to learn how to listen in layers.

Established in 1948 when Palestinians began to be militarily driven out of their lands, the camps and gatherings across the Middle East are testament to the struggle of everyday life and to the violent Zionist negation of the Right of Return for Palestinians to lands, villages and cities. They are the modern world's most permanent political refugees. The camps in Lebanon are described by most social agencies as the most deprived, dilapidated and destitute among the diaspora, "...its coiffure of corrugated iron in the sun like a skin laid out to dry."¹²³ On the other hand the Palestinians of Lebanon have been the most independent outside Palestine. They held the heartbeat of the revolution before the Israeli siege and attack in 1982. Soon after, the heart of the rumble moved to the First Intifada in West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem.

*Although sometimes as they listen back to the atmosphere or the background of the interview the rumble is clear. Low. Undeniably tired but not defeated.*¹²⁴

Before I started training and recording (sounds and interviews) in the camps I had never heard so many motorcycle engines: small, cheeky, urgent, fast, running on the outer edges of the recording or trampling right across the middle through the tiniest of passages right under the window of that house, on the side we thought we were safe. Sometimes in the middle of the night on the other side of the world, the motorcycles ride across inside my brain.

¹²³ Césaire, *Notebook of a Return*, 6.

¹²⁴ Alaa El Ali, *Ya Sabra, Gaza*, trans. Rose Nakad, *Less Than Zero Blog*, <http://www.less-than-zero-less-than-zero.blogspot.com/> (accessed May 15, 2013).

Listening needs to learn how to produce them out, so that training can focus on (in order of least importance): cleaning and filtering, compressor effects, noise filters, fast fades, 25 volume adjustment points across 20 seconds of sound to minimise as much as possible that last remote echo of the motor, mattresses across windows, the flower shop owner and Hajj from the corner house blocking motorcycles out of the alleyway (except for emergencies) until recording is complete. Taking long breaks and location walks when the electricity goes and generators rev-up.

...time spent between the crashes and recoveries as the sleeping time, so the conversations and exchanges that occur, whether they are casual or curricular, can inform the class like a dream.¹²⁵

Three hour workshops or his role as coordinator, no longer make any sense. He eventually starts to work out ways to be relevant, undeniably in bureaucratic soldier status, but working hard to defect. To agitate the time and rhythm of how he has been till now, and to learn how to offer complex and thoughtful training: defecting from the patronising, the simplistic, the beginning, the intermediate and the advanced. To rise to the demands of a particular time and place and peoples who still choose to locate themselves along a continuity of resistance and struggle.

How working life appears, secretive and wary

We used to hide weapons in our bedrolls. We hid important information in the beds of old women.¹²⁶

The most important ethical implications for me lay in the representation of working life within the confines of this research process and dissertation. How could the representation of working life do justice to its complexities and intensities? How would I reference ideas and theorisations of colleagues, participants and wider community members? How would I express the way particular social political contexts and locations (neighbourhoods, schools, villages and refugee camps) influenced the trajectory of the process, the artwork being made and me? And how would I avoid making myself the centre of practice I take from, when I definitely was not? Personal observations seem so inadequate.

¹²⁵ Paul Chan, "The Unbearable Lightness of New Media Education: Notes on Teaching, Technology, and Art" (presentation at the International Symposium on Electronic Art, Paris, December 7-10, 2000), http://isea-archives.org/docs/2000/proceedings/ISEA2000_proceedings.pdf (accessed August 1, 2016).

¹²⁶ Stree Shakti Sanghatana, "Interview with **Kondapalli Koteswaramma**," 134.

“Writing in the feminine. And on a colored sky. How do you inscribe difference without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your own kind?”¹²⁷ Each time I tried to tell the story of experiences from the field I not only tripped over my conscious, but mistrusted the very sentence before it appeared. The ethics committee asked me to search my soul (and they should), but I already had. My opposition to the claims of transformation in the writings about the field,¹²⁸ and the theoretical concern to challenge depiction and didactic representation, further agitated the need to look for other ways to consider the presence of working life in order to take from it.

As soon as I was free, I wanted to forget everything, even that frivolous promise of writing it all down, of telling the world about it.¹²⁹

Depicting can very easily become informing, or informing on. In Lebanon NGOs are places where spies really do exist. Researchers/workers can be real collaborators. Or unwittingly used by foreign departments and “partner” embassies to collect information to further imperial policies. And in the end, if it’s all just a nasty rumour about a researcher/worker the question remains: how did the depiction of a project and its social context impact on the reality of its context? I would like to complete this dissertation without relying on truth depictions, which can also slide into ethnographic constructions. I want to avoid the threat of objectifying and reducing in representation the peoples, locations and social struggles that contribute to this research.

Working life appears as fragments of narrative: spaces of production and training carved into the research. Narratives, extracting memory-moments out of working life emphasise a need, while being a method of talking about community arts as a series of moments of production, politics and pedagogy. They highlight the problem of trying to depict down dynamic and complex processes, while providing a strategy to hold knowledge generated through practice. They help

¹²⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 28.

¹²⁸ Further examples are discussed in section four. See also discussion of the Sydney organisation ICE: Christina Ho, “Western Sydney is Hot! Community Arts and Changing Perceptions of the West,” *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* 5 (2012): 35-55. And discussion of Speed Street and other projects by Urban Theatre Projects: Ian Maxwell, “The Middle Years: Death Defying Theatre Transformed,” *Urban Theatre Projects*, <http://urbantheatre.com.au/critical-writing/the-middle-years-death-defying-theatre-transformed/> (accessed August 27, 2016). These are projects/organisations I have worked with or been privy to local criticism about: criticisms absent from these articles (Maxwell), or mentioned in passing without critical engagement (Ho).

¹²⁹ Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnificent*, 155.

to begin from the detail of practice, to isolate moments that help move the research to others: "...process, but not as development; rather as a catching fire between extremes, which no longer allow for any secure middle ground or harmony of spontaneity."¹³⁰

Narratives of practice hold mistakes, joys, successes and regrets: spaces from which to launch and a place of return, carrying knowledge and wounds of working life. I feel them as studied, arising out of critical reflection and theorising about the work I have been involved in. They attempt to avoid potential imprisonment of ideas by depiction and the "what is," and struggle to practice a "what could be." I understand them as becomings in practice that appear in this research as launching grounds for autonomous production and training in community arts.

The narratives are fictional: they contain the real, but do not claim to be the real. They are wilfully fictional as opposed to the accidentally fictional that conventional depiction may suffer. They in themselves are not to be trusted; nothing should be trusted or taken at its "facialised" value when we take on the responsibility of working with vulnerable peoples. Not claiming to give a whole depiction leaves room for distrust and for the purpose of this research, richer methodological possibilities. Narratives of practice possess a partial identity as remembrance, but restlessly struggle to disrupt what has come before. They call on the "untruthful" conduit of memory to grapple with community arts and "...to explore fully the possibilities offered to the present by the past that we now imagine...efforts to renew experience in the crucible of art."¹³¹

Narratives of practice are attempts to theorise with practice: they hold contentions and create points of departure to ignite other fires, and to move community arts toward more revolutionary praxis. This is also a way to move theory and practice against each other and helps to make the research one of *how*. My working experiences with young people, artists and cultural workers from the Palestinian camps of Lebanon and western Sydney help to theorise concepts, enrich them in the same way that the work of well known thinkers and artists do. They do not form elements of practice that need to be assessed and critiqued, but seek to actively take part in theorising, forcing theory to make space for conceptual practice.

¹³⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven," in *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (London: University of California Press, 2002), 567.

¹³¹ Aldon Lynn Nielsen, "Fugitive Fictions," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 329.

To the assembly, he recounted a story that Durito told him of a horse who escaped a dire fate by slipping away to another story.¹³²

The narratives will not reveal names, specific times and locations. Community arts is full of open hearts and hardworking approaches. I do not want to denigrate people who bring these to the work, even as I question the wisdom of good intentions without a commitment to challenge their political implications or the capacity to change the real. Fictionalising critique will strengthen the desire to talk about established dictates of practice, away from the personal and into a critical space where establishment community arts is weakened to make way for new interventions of the personal: "...molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire."¹³³ I will also protect myself. Events featuring in narratives are not just those I have observed, but projects I have been involved in, mistakes I have made.

"Oh! Poor me - What a history. This lad was writing memory with a firestick that made lightning look dull."¹³⁴ Fictional narratives of practice are a method of enquiry related to content, while also being of the form of this dissertation. I have tried to infuse the grain of the writings with the resistant or critical oppositional-ity I have learnt about from many of the peoples I have worked with. I have tried to create a voice to make them breathe through the tone or the rhythm of the writings: infusing them with bodies of stoic refugee camp dwellings, anti colonial battles in banana plantations, tales of brilliance in public and domestic survival.

¹³² Subcomandante Marcos, *Conversations with Durito*, 11.

¹³³ Guattari, *The Three*, 20.

¹³⁴ Wright, *Carpentaria*, 163.

Three: agitating theories across art and the real

African American writer and thinker Amiri Baraka, and German critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse help bring militancy and urgency. All three thinkers were committed to a concept of art as formally experimental and restive. Never satisfied with mere depiction, art is less object and more about the production of disruptive truths and logic worlds, different to the logic of the material real/social. At the same time art is intrinsically tied to, generated by and accountable to the suffering of the real and must be theorised and created out of consciousness that stands against oppressive systems of control. This double character of art will help sketch theoretical assertions (weapons) for an art to take back into community arts.

Both Marcuse and Adorno affirmed the almost arrogant right of art to its own aesthetic formal world. "Injecting Marxism with a vaccine...,"¹³⁵ both thinkers wrote against prevalent Marxist tendencies, in particular the creation of descriptive or didactic art (notable in the genre of social realism). Autonomous art, as experiment with form, is aesthetic social resistance. For Baraka, the terrors of white supremacy were, along with capitalism, always at the centre from which he wrote. Art (as thought) must become forms of revolution as "...the eternity of the world, the endless breath, the endless heartbeat. To deny it is to lie and truth is the final reality."¹³⁶

My work crosses disciplines in the way the wider world of community arts crosses into art, politics, sociology and community development. It can be located as critical theory, drawing on artistic, social and political perspectives that struggle to bring "...self-conscious critique...the need to develop a discourse of social...emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions."¹³⁷ The following writings contextualise the work of Baraka, Adorno and Marcuse in the research while focusing on ways that art and the real can reverberate across each other and in community arts. They struggle against synthesis and conclusion: to make thought and art non descriptive and actively dissatisfied with what exists, both for the theoretical content the research offers to community arts and in the methods and forms it uses.

¹³⁵ Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 17.

¹³⁶ Amiri Baraka, *Lecture on Revolutionary Poetry*, Naropa University Lecture, 1:58:12, 1994, http://www.archive.org/details/naropa_amiri_baraka_lecture_on (accessed July 25, 2016).

¹³⁷ Henry Giroux, "Critical Theory and Schooling: Implications for the Development of a Radical Pedagogy," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 3, no. 2 (1983): 1.

Adorno and Marcuse, beginnings and context

Urgency

The philosophy of Adorno is often starkly harsh and uncompromising: at times one feels in his words the kind of iron and ore he so painstakingly attacked in the old fascism of Europe and its new democratic version emerging from north America. I began my research with the strong intellectual feeling that in general, the “happy” and the “harmony” of so many community arts projects and artworks seemed dangerously uncritical and urgently in need of some good strong “negativity” and distrust of current practices, tendencies central to Adorno’s work.

Although he wrote a great deal in many different fields, he attacked the major advances in all of them, functioning like an enormous shower of sulphuric acid poured over the lot.¹³⁸

Long after Europe’s second war with itself Adorno continued to theorise as if he was in the middle of a resistance war where urgency is demanded and compromise could lead to catastrophe, making art and culture about life and death. In *Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*, Edward Said reads this tendency as part of what he calls “late style,” borrowing the term from Adorno’s own writings about Beethoven’s later works. Various essays - drawn from Said’s writings and university courses - consider the works of various composers, performers and writers. Said was attracted to works that were intransigent and disruptive. “Late style is what happens if Art does not abdicate its rights in favor of reality.”¹³⁹ Art maintains its own terms and the integrity of experiment with form is the unashamed and vigorous commitment to the creation of an “other” world: its own symbolics and sense, refusing to follow the dictates of progress, order and scientific logic of market systems. Late style happens when the artist “...abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Said, *On Late Style*, 22.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 8.

Late style opposes the idea that the time before death requires closure or a set of concluding aesthetic statements. It rejects a synthesis of experience and knowledge into harmonious endings, and struggles to open new lines of aesthetic enquiry. There is no bursting through of a final truth or discovery before death. Late style is also not necessarily about impending death.¹⁴¹ Rather, death appears in art as “refracted,” ironic or estranged, and it is through intensities of form and aesthetics that: “Lateness as theme and as style keeps reminding us of death...”¹⁴² While it can be informed by wisdoms or experiential understandings, Said’s extrapolations go beyond temporal connotations of the word “late” and speak to it through the quality of urgency. “Lateness...always brings time in its wake. It is a way of remembering time...”¹⁴³ Late style is aesthetic urgency to be struggled for at all times, a way of understanding agitation and urgency in the making of art.

Methods and forms

Aesthetic Theory was Adorno’s last work and like *Late Style* was posthumously published by family and colleagues. It is a daunting book to read, with “...a constantly looming sense of being caught in a vortex, as if there is no knowing whether one has been through a particular passage before, or if perhaps one has never left the spot.”¹⁴⁴ With an (over) abundance of thoughts and threads to follow out and back, the text is constantly sabotaged by grotesque repetitions that become its “...innermost antagonist.”¹⁴⁵ “Nothing supports the text except the intensity with which it draws on and pushes against itself.”¹⁴⁶ The image is never completed, but thickly and densely pixelated in a simultaneously logical and contradictory manner that confronts the illusion of knowledge as “subject,” capable of grasping or describing the whole of existence (object).

...sustained tension, unaccommodated stubbornness, lateness and newness next to each other by virtue of an “inexorable clamp that holds together what no less powerfully strives to break apart.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴² Ibid, 24.

¹⁴³ Michael Wood, introduction to *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*, by Edward Said (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), xi.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Hullot-Kentor, introduction to *Aesthetic Theory*, by Theodor W. Adorno, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), xvii-xviii.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, xvii.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, xvi.

¹⁴⁷ Said, *On Late Style*, 17.

The labyrinth¹⁴⁸ of *Aesthetic Theory* is “paratactical” in its structure where each “para” attempts to become the whole book itself: “...long, complex phrases, each of which seems under the obligation to present the book as a whole.”¹⁴⁹ The tension that Said read in Adorno’s work has to be maintained and the singularity of each phrase must become towards some kind of maximum if the writings are to sustain their unfolding. “Since the text does not labor under schematic requirements it can and must take a decisively new breath for every line.”¹⁵⁰ But this also means the text is unrestricted by traditional forms of structure which can dominate and dictate content to the detriment of complexity in thought.

At the same time, “...the more extensive the paratactical work...and *Aesthetic Theory* is almost unparalleled in this - the greater the potential for its unravelling at each and every point.”¹⁵¹ The constant threat of unravelling or breaking apart is a quality of theory that reverberates with community arts, which often happens in situations and contexts where no amount of planning or structure can guarantee the “success” of a project. Unravelling is also a quality of Adorno’s theorising, making *Aesthetic Theory* an example of a central concept in his work: that form mediates content, or that form should struggle to become the very content it is advocating.

Paratactical is not just a structure, but a way to put in play or to make textual practice out of thought and to make each particular its own world.¹⁵² It can also be understood as a “continually shifting constellation.”¹⁵³ The idea of constellation is taken from the work of fellow critical theorist Walter Benjamin and attempts to oppose linear or causal interpretations of history and thought for a more spatial negotiation.

By looking at the social and political constellations stored in the categories of any theory, Adorno...believed that their history could be traced and thus their existing limitations revealed.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), xv.

¹⁴⁹ Hullot-Kentor, introduction, xiv.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, xvii.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, xvi.

¹⁵² Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic*, 46 and 48.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Giroux, “Critical Theory and Schooling,” 6.

Adorno tried to create “meaning” in the way he assembled constellations, which as one reads also work in reverse, unravelling into detail: “...a sort of furious machine decomposing itself into smaller and smaller parts.”¹⁵⁵ Constellation also creates a spatial structure against hierarchy or first or founding principles of philosophy. Just as Adorno maintained intellectual opposition to a reality occupied by the market and its developing “administered society,” he also maintained a distrust of thought itself: rejecting accepted assumptions or transcendental principles on which to build observations in any positivist manner.

...the fetishism of facts and the belief in value neutrality represented more than an epistemological error; more importantly, such a stance served as a form of ideological hegemony that infused positivist rationality with a political conservatism that makes it an ideological prop of the status quo.¹⁵⁶

Adorno and Marcuse’s work was located in Frankfurt School attempts to reinvigorate theory away from conventional social sciences, where “...facts become separated from values, objectivity undermines critique...”¹⁵⁷ For Adorno and Marcuse, methods of collection, classification and description of facts miss the fundamental difference between the world as it is described, and how it could become: betraying the world, and thought at the same time. The difference between worlds as represented or described, and worlds as they could become through art and the process of its making, is a major heart of my research.

Reading *Aesthetic Theory* was very painful, but also very joyful. In order to grasp ideas to be taken to work in community arts it was necessary to detach from the material world. The experience of a text so densely theoretical, referencing artworks and a cultural context so outside and different to my own, isolated and estranged me from the time and space I was living, but also brought me closer to it in many ways. The struggle in the text to remain committed to material suffering made possible certain meeting places: ideas, which in their detailed expression, universalised towards or across difference in time and place and spoke vividly to the kind of community arts this research struggles to imagine.

¹⁵⁵ Said, *On Late Style*, 23.

¹⁵⁶ Giroux, “Critical Theory and Schooling,” 5.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 4.

My experience with *Aesthetic Theory* as isolation, paradoxically opening theoretical directions, did not lead to Bollywood endings of happily applying theory to practice. Rather it complexatised and problematised, exposing areas of practice in community arts impossible to unravel or theorise, even though some of the practice strategies I offer aim to be as detailed as possible in what they imagine. This also exposed the limits of theory to community arts (and the limits of my own theorising), so contingent on its particularities of time and place and peoples.

This type of paradoxical happening echoes a negative dialectic, as opposed to the other dialectic of orthodox Marxist analysis. *Aesthetic Theory* is an example of the way Adorno used theory as a space to “...construct his demystifying negative dialectics...,”¹⁵⁸ unfolding a contradictory and wrought relation between art and the real. Adorno’s works meets with my intention to keep lines of thinking open and in constant agitation. Isolation from the world into theory demonstrates falseness if it concludes in absolute or totalising assertions.

Negative dialectics carries on from Marx’s material dialectics where economic class struggle as the engine of history replaces Hegel’s mind and spirit. Frankfurt School thinkers located themselves in the dialectical tradition, but the primary point of departure from “vulgar”¹⁵⁹ Marxism was its search for closure to the unjust contradictions of the social and historical. Adorno and Marcuse opposed reconciliation into a unifying whole in thought and also opposed a synthesising into a vision of class justice. The different parts of struggle do not create a whole. “What has evidently gripped Adorno in Beethoven’s late work is its episodic character, its apparent disregard for its own continuity.”¹⁶⁰ Trying to understand truth as part of a complete system leads to untruth and further from freedom. Negative dialectical theorisations do not establish closures and clarify concepts, but put them into constant critical play.

...no aspect of social reality could be taken as final, complete, or wholly determinant. Each element had to be interpreted in terms of its interaction within the changing social totality.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Said, *On Late Style*, 19.

¹⁵⁹ Jerry G. Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 346.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 10.

¹⁶¹ Thomas Andrae, “Adorno on Film and Mass Culture: The Culture Industry Reconsidered,” *Jump Cut* 20 (1979), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC20folder/AdornoMassCult.html> (accessed July 25, 2016).

The continuous analysis of “subject-society-power”¹⁶² is in dialogue with events and happenings as they change, devoid of preordained frameworks that can lead theory to mystify or normalise developments in the real. The possibility for justice comes out of a thinking space created by agitated irreconcilability, contingent on the unfolding of the social, economic and historical of any given moment and distrustful of normalised appearance and its interpretation: so that for example historical elements are exposed or unlayered, agitating the rational line between past as gone and the present as purely now.

Immanent critique is the assertion of difference, the refusal to collapse appearance and essence, i.e., the willingness to analyze the reality of the social object against its possibilities.¹⁶³

Frankfurt School thinkers also opposed a dominant formula within Marxist thought that decreed revolutionary change to be determined by changes in the economic base, rather than changes in institutions and forces of society (superstructure), and despite the agency of people (“consciousness and subjectivity”¹⁶⁴). Critical theorists reinvigorated dialectical analysis between base and superstructure, arguing that capitalism built its strength from both sides and that analysing elements of culture and “...the political effects of technical rationality on the cultural realm...,”¹⁶⁵ helped uncover truths about the economic base and about the way late capitalism had begun to demonstrate its resilience and flexibility: adjusting itself in the face of threat by incorporating challenges to its hegemony.

Marcuse in particular entered the active world of the “superstructure” through his development of “new left” concepts and an engagement with revolutionary (student) movements, while Adorno remained somehow more inside theory, (excessively) wary of the political turning into the “ideological.”¹⁶⁶ He demonstrated a stubbornness and unwillingness to leave the world of thought (even while talking about praxis). In a paradoxical way it is partly this aspect of his work I am bringing to the practice and to the kind of art we could make with the people we work with,

¹⁶² Marianna Papastephanou, “Aesthetics, Education, the Critical Autonomous Self, and the Culture Industry,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40, no. 3 (2006): 77.

¹⁶³ Giroux, “Critical Theory and Schooling,” 6.

¹⁶⁴ Andrae, “Adorno on Film.”

¹⁶⁵ Giroux, “Critical Theory and Schooling,” 9.

¹⁶⁶ Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” trans. Esther Leslie. *New Left Review* 1, no. 233 (1999): 123-36. Marcuse saw student movements of the time as extending theory into practice, while Adorno saw them as ossifying theory into the same structures they stood against.

contrary to the humanitarian and dialogical tendencies so prevalent in the field - a kind of hardcore understanding of art which contains "...heroism...but also intransigence."¹⁶⁷ I am interested in an art for community arts that is more concerned with itself than with the aim to dialogue or "participate" outside of itself. This is partly a definition of the much discussed and (in community arts) misunderstood or maligned notion of art's autonomy.

My engagement with Adorno and Marcuse work focuses on certain ideas about art and its relation to the real. From the vast works of both thinkers (and the huge scholarly fields they have generated), I draw primarily from *Aesthetic Theory* by Adorno and *The Aesthetic Dimension* by Marcuse. There are many aspects of their work omitted: histories of European modern art, historical trajectories of philosophical concepts and the drawing from psychoanalytical concepts of Freud. Marcuse also moved in and out of particular periods and works of modern art. In *The Aesthetic Dimension* his focus is on literature, while Adorno's was generally on music and literature. The other omission in my engagement is that of reception. My concern has been to draw out ideas for production: theoretical weapons to take to work in community arts. These will be further layered by the practice itself, to push theory to embody the responsibility of what art and its production could become in community arts.

Autonomy, art as itself and its other

Aesthetic Theory clusters continuously around the need for art's autonomy: around the idea that real or "authentic" art is autonomous. At its most basic autonomy is the refusal of art as a functional or instrumental tool and adherence to the "...freedom of art from religious, political, and other social roles."¹⁶⁸ The necessity for art's autonomy is also the basic premise of *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, another late text of the Frankfurt School by Herbert Marcuse first published in 1977. Marcuse's concern is to salvage art and its independence from the content focused, didactic prescriptions of mainstream Marxism. Both Adorno and Marcuse believed that autonomous works of art exist in their own realms, possessing their own techniques and logic: art's sphere of operation is the aesthetic, different to the real world which is dictated by modernist regimes of rationality.

¹⁶⁷ Said, *On Late Style*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Zuidervaat, *Adorno's Aesthetic*, 32.

Artworks are afterimages of empirical life insofar as they help the latter to what is denied them...and thereby free it from that to which they are condemned by reified external experience. Although the demarcation line between art and the empirical must not be effaced...not least by the glorification of the artist.¹⁶⁹

This does not mean, as is often claimed about autonomy, that art becomes elitist or unconcerned with the social. The opposite is true: autonomy is contingent on an intense concern with the material world. It stands in opposition to (capitalism) and its methods, but in empathy with suffering. The difference of art's aesthetic world is its strength and it is only in autonomy that art can promise opposition. Art needs to claim the right and the necessity to create its own aesthetic world, using the possibilities of form. It is through the way that content is mediated and transformed through experiment with form, that works of autonomous art establish their opposition and affinity with the social.

Art cannot claim to stand in opposition to suffering, while using the same methods (forms) of the empirical (the real). It is those very methods that stand guilty of collaboration in the manufacture of suffering. This is where art's revolutionary power lies: in its estrangement from the real and the ways it manufactures oppressive knowledge. This is the only way that art stands a chance of expressing "truth content" (beyond itself as artefact) that can expose and disrupt. This is one of the reasons why at times Adorno and Marcuse claimed that art was also praxis: from within its form, its way of being, it points to or puts in motion other ways of thinking and doing.

Art is anti social, but at the same time it is intimately linked to what it is not and shares a common existence within the social: its (oppressive) relations of production, history and the actual material imported from the real world into artworks. Art, in the Marxist sense is embedded in society. Any particular artwork arises out of the same material circumstances of its time and place and is irrevocably tied to the same structures and forces of injustice. The traces of the empirical (the real) can never be destroyed or erased and in fact such destruction would end up in the erasure of autonomy itself, resulting in a falseness of rarefied works or an empty formalism. This dependence is part of autonomy's contradictory (negative) relation to the real.

¹⁶⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 4.

Art can be understood as a monad. The productive, negatively structured world of autonomous art is a temporal world within which the tensions of the social are played out, exposed and worked on. But it is a “windowless monad.”¹⁷⁰ Negativity, rather than direct use of particular materials brings forth the social (and historical) in a changed manner. Works of art committed to their difference *affect* the social, so that its way of being inside the artwork is transformed. But tensions can never be resolved because of the injustice that remains outside the window. The absence of window is an expression of art’s negative engagement with what is outside, its isolation of itself and the impossibility of reconciliation. Monad is a battle ground on which form and content mediate with each other and what is outside the window.

Autonomous art and its political struggles stand against most manifestations of conventional community arts. This is the very reason for its relevance to a research project that wants to disrupt corporate welfare tendencies and the salvation of art as a mirror of reality, a bearer of solutions, giver of information, or indeed a provider of (false) relief, fun or fantasy. Adorno and Marcuse’s theories have assisted in arguing against the tendency in community arts to create formally conventional works which seem obsessed with showing the problems of the poor and marginalised or endlessly dialoguing about them. The social burden forced on art stultifies projects into pacification and limits imagination, while “social change” becomes a series of images hanging on the wall of someone’s misery. The possibility of opposition and resistance is locked out, taking community arts art further from its often professed aim to transform, exposing the salvation tendencies described so well by Grant Kester in his 1995 article, “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art.”

The concept of “import” is a way to understand the existence of the social in autonomous art: the hermeneutical expression of what is taken from the real. Import and “function” (the life of a work outside in the world) help to think about the tension between art and the empirical. The artwork adheres to its difference, but its material life can reach past itself as artefact (truth content), but also limited by the autonomy of art. Function helps to understand art as possessing resolve, without the kind of instrumental purpose ascribed to conventional understandings of social or political art. Function is not the intention of the work, but is, in its engagement with the material world (on its own terms) a possibility, activated in a further dialectical turn with each time and place, which also mediate its import in a changing manner.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹⁷¹ Robert W. Witkin, “Why did Adorno “Hate” Jazz?” *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (2000): 149.

...historical conditions are present in the work in several ways: explicitly, or as background and horizon, and in the language and imagery. But they are the specific historical expressions and manifestations of...its own dimension of truth, protest and promise, a dimension constituted by the aesthetic form.¹⁷²

Part of the social is historical. While avoiding the tendency to document or describe the past, history is inscribed onto the aesthetics of autonomous works, contingent on the historical as part of their social process of concept formulation.¹⁷³ The social - as history, memory, or market (oppressive relations of production) - is harboured in autonomous art as sedimented content, which is aesthetic form.¹⁷⁴ Sediment is like the "...shabby, damaged world of images...the negative imprint of the administered world..."¹⁷⁵ in Samuel Beckett's plays where a "...second world of images..."¹⁷⁶ springs forth, not directly depicted, but through the play of form in the artwork's elements, working for its own new sense. Concerned to speak, while not speaking to, where a non didactic distance of the social and historical makes them intensely present in a way their direct immediacy could not. Sedimented social and historical forces become layers of force.

Such mediated understandings of the presence of real life in content, can be a powerful concept for a practice like community arts. The idea is not to remove the social but to reconfigure: not to remove the knowledge and experiences of the people we work with, but to avoid the transplanting of lives directly into art work, and to work with form to transform their status as fixed within the empirical. Later this will be discussed further with the concept of semblance as a way of understanding how the empirical can live in the social art of community arts in an autonomous manner and how this concept can be used as a praxis strategy in the making of art.

Postscript: autonomous wounds

The tension between art and the social is part of art's "double character."¹⁷⁷ it's being-in-itself, while also inextricably linked to what is outside. In the work of both Adorno and Marcuse this doubleness is constantly inscribed and reproduced. Different characteristics of autonomous art

¹⁷² Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), xii.

¹⁷³ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 17.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 5.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 31.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 31.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 5.

are further doubled into social and historical concepts. In their refusal to mimic the real, artworks express internal struggles, where different binaries dialectically play. Some of these will be discussed in section five and help take the research along praxis lines of production and training, grounded within art's fraught relationship with its other and itself. For now it is important to understand autonomy as struggle or process, rather than definition or description.

Adorno and Marcuse focused on artistic tendencies/artworks and the theories that engaged them from the early period of Europe's modernity. I use the word "modernity" to locate a temporal focus, and not in conformity with conventional narratives of Europe as transitioning into the rational from its "dark" ages. Obviously there have been many challenges to this fairytale of progress: Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, feminist and post modernist challenges and the work of anti colonial thinkers questioning the very claim of rationality and reason in "light of" Europe's violent assertion of its alleged supremacy through the transatlantic slave trade and colonial belligerence.

Autonomy is fraught: a modernist wound that art bears. If Europe's enlightenment freed art from the mythic, the religious or cultic, reason fixed art into a type of autonomy "... nourished by the idea of humanity."¹⁷⁸ The new mythical forces of reason proposed a rarefied version of autonomy for art in its search for "...harmonization of the beautiful and the true...,"¹⁷⁹ its development consistent with an increasingly brutal and unequal capitalism.

The purity of bourgeois art, hypostatized as a realm of freedom contrasting to material praxis, was bought from the outset with the exclusion of the lower class; and art keeps faith with the cause of that class, the true universal, precisely by freeing itself from the purposes of the false. Serious art has denied itself to those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness...Light art has accompanied autonomous art as its shadow. It is the social bad conscience of serious art. The truth which the latter could not apprehend because of its social premises gives the former an appearance of objective justification.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Hebert Marcuse, "Art as a Form of Reality," *New Left Review* I, no. 74, (1972): 54.

¹⁸⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 107.

This falseness, after the secularisation so necessary to its appearance, makes autonomy suspicious and burdened. “The clichés of art’s reconciling glow enfolding the world are repugnant...”¹⁸¹ because they reproduce the same solace that modernism claimed emancipation from. Autonomy can be dismissed as a trick of the false freedoms of European reason-logic, guarding the gates of the market with a false espousing of humanity, while “...its universality remains allied to ideology as long as real hunger is perpetuated in hunger for the material in the aesthetic domain.”¹⁸²

From inside its production, art must practice the irrevocable responsibility of antagonism to material injustice and domination, or risk falling into rarefied phenomena that celebrates its own existence as bourgeois modernism. This should also extend to itself in the form of antagonism to established artistic methods and “styles” always at risk of making art useful to and incorporated (commodified) by the very domination it claims to oppose.¹⁸³ Experiment, refreshed resistance against standardised forms is intrinsic to the struggle for autonomy, which is never a guaranteed status. All art, which may have practiced autonomy at the time and place of its creation, can at some point become a soldier of the market.¹⁸⁴

But the almost impossibility of autonomy does not denounce art’s desire for it. While being illusory, it must be struggled for. Even then the concentric circles of *Aesthetic Theory* begin again. Throughout the text the wound is never healed, but spreads out across the tension between art and its other. Modern art’s autonomy is a wound that bleeds.

Art one, the first escape

When art escapes from its isolated elite confinement to move and be among the people, it takes on a refreshed responsibility to join with the struggles of life. Art needs to prove itself, so to speak. To instigate commitment to the urgent efforts among so many people in this world to disrupt, sabotage and interfere with the suffering of life.

¹⁸¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 1.

¹⁸² Theodor W. Adorno, “The Schema of Mass Culture,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2005), 81.

¹⁸³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 46-47.

¹⁸⁴ Larry Hartwick, “On ‘The Aesthetic Dimension’: A Conversation with Herbert Marcuse,” *Contemporary Literature* 22, no. 4 (1981): 417.

A work of art that is committed strips the magic from a work of art that is content to be a fetish, an idle past-time for those who would like to sleep through the deluge that threatens them, in an apoliticism that is in fact deeply political.¹⁸⁵

Art's methods of struggle are different to those of a person, community or social movement. Its major weapon is itself, but with no risk to its bodily harm. Art's realm is so different that one can even question its existence.¹⁸⁶ Art is not ordered to brandish identity cards at a scolding roof of a prison checkpoint. It doesn't have to survive hunger, or a gun wild police officer, the treasonous fist of the one meant to love you, torture by security, or the jabbing spit of a school principal.

She killed the one who lied to her people, who actively participated in the slow extinction of her race. She killed Him. She killed the white storeman in "her story" which is not "just a story"...

Art begins tentatively, discovering a capacity to wait, talk less and listen more. Each time, place and people it goes among stretches, fades, cuts and treats art as a friend from a different world. Art understands back with the red lash of a leaf falling up,¹⁸⁸ killer colonial pamphlets swept back,¹⁸⁹ or the insurgent dust of a quivering memory¹⁹⁰ as the "...the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible."¹⁹¹

Even though systems of power have found many ways to invade imagination (culture industries, drug wars and madness complexes), once autonomous and disruptive aesthetics are imagined, crafted and produced they can leave sensory traces: as sensibilities of the real.

¹⁸⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," trans. Francis McDonagh, *New Left Review* 1, no. 87-88 (1974): 75-76.

¹⁸⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 1.

¹⁸⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 149. From the final chapter where Minh-ha unfolds a poetic treatise of woman as storyteller, after deconstructing white (and feminist) discourses that attempt to conceptually control the work of woman writers of colour (Toni Cade Bambara and Zora Neale Hurston). This text provides intellectual weaponry necessary for the political act of writing when one faces from the outside and from within, a denial of agency and experiment encouraged by gender and race marginalisation.

¹⁸⁸ Mahmoud Yekta, *Do You Like It Here*, Short Film, Sydney, 1998.

¹⁸⁹ StudioCamps, *مناشير Leaflets*, Audiovisual Poetry, 0:30, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3cULzVOv7s> (accessed July 25, 2016).

¹⁹⁰ StudioCamps, *حيد Keep Out*, Short Film, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWPCHnTyM3k>, (accessed July 25, 2016).

¹⁹¹ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 6.

Amiri Baraka, beginnings and context

Amiri Baraka's writings are vast and prolific, crossing shifting political strategies and genres: poems (on paper and performed), plays, stories and essays, most of which also cross into each other's formal playground. Baraka was always an activist, and often wrote about the way real life and political struggle kept his experimentations with words accountable to their suffering. This is part of what makes Baraka a prolific figure: the constant agitation of thought/art and political action. Black Nationalism, Marxism and the politics of art as avant-garde, in differing intensities meet in his writings and his aesthetic activism in theatre collectives, writing workshops, lectures and political campaigns.

Baraka's movement across different ideologies has been almost beaten to death in the writings about him, and seems to be given false prominence over the vastness of his work. They note his beginnings as a prominent Beatnik in the New York artist hub of Greenwich Village in the 1950s, his shift to Harlem and role in the Black Arts Movement (changing his name from LeRoi Jones to Imamu Amiri Baraka), and then in the seventies to a Marxist Leninist ideology (during which he dropped "Imamu"). There were changes in his writings, but certain core ideas or hearts of the matter remain throughout. Baraka takes from various artistic traditions in western art, but his works do not recognise the divide of high/low art, or popular/avant-garde. His essays and poetry add autonomous subjectivity and anti racist/colonial sentiment, helping to complexatise and layer the ideas I have taken from Adorno and Marcuse.

Below I begin an engagement with Baraka's work that draws on several dimensions of his art and theorising. The first is about the struggle to make art become a material force. A concern with art that is less about its "effect" or its ability to "represent" and more about its struggle to become force: to materialise as the change it calls for. Or as Baraka would say to link the "is" to the "be," and to transform "noun" into action.¹⁹² Baraka's work, within the urgency of his anti colonial and anti white supremacy, maintains the kind of autonomy Adorno called for, but struggles to make art cross the border into action, helping to take the research beyond the Eurocentric dead ends of "one-dimensionality"¹⁹³ and despair that occur in Adorno's work.

¹⁹² Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 142.

¹⁹³ Thomas Andrae, "Adorno on Film." The author invokes the title of Marcuse's 1964 book, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* to describe Adorno's limitations on jazz and film.

The second aspect of my engagement appears in section five and will link the materialisation of art as action to a consciousness with form. Baraka's writings were always experimental. It is rare to read an essay, introduction, poem, lecture or short story comfortable with any existing conventional formula. Certain works are extremely experimental, especially his works of fiction (long and short) in which Baraka demonstrates "...how brilliant he can be conducting a jam session with his own pen."¹⁹⁴ They depart in almost every literary aspect from mainstream or conventionally published writing. In his essays he calls for experimentation as a way to struggle for freedom artistically and socially. This "freedom principle"¹⁹⁵ is a constant motif in his works, which also operate pedagogically in their unfolding of strategies and historical examples.

Artistic and social freedom is also about content. Baraka's works express an agitated movement between form and content: equally important to resistant art for both aesthetic and activist reasons. They emphasise the necessity to also centralise content and its careful choosing: and to create the experimental out of the local and familiar. I will draw from the "popular"¹⁹⁶ of Baraka's avant-garde to help argue that consciousness with form (and content) is not the property of European modernism, but needs to be understood as located within the time, place and peoples of a project. Art making in community arts creates from local detail and lives/knowledge of participants. This is consistent with most understandings of community arts, but the difference in my research is that content is mediated (transformed by form), both in the object and the process of its creation: made poetically new and disruptive as it exposes the invisible in the visible, the extraordinary in the mundane.

The third aspect of Baraka's work also appears in section five and is concerned with object and process. Baraka saw the object of art as a kind of leftover: a deceptive expression of an aesthetic process of thought. His view has helped guide the breaking down of object into moments of politically oppositional training and creation. I am advocating a return to the production of objects in community arts, intrinsically linked to or agitated (out of its elite status) by the process of its making, driven by desire for revolution and justice.

¹⁹⁴ Greg Tate, "Vicious Modernism," foreword to *The Fiction of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2000), xv.

¹⁹⁵ Kalamu ya Salaam, "Amiri Baraka Analyzes How He Writes," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 219.

¹⁹⁶ James Smethurst, "'Pat Your Foot and Turn the Corner': Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement, and the Poetics of a Popular Avant-Garde," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003), 265.

Baraka's work has inspired a significant amount of scholarly work, controversy and opposition.¹⁹⁷ Many of the writings I draw on come from literary theory. In particular I found a dedicated issue of the *African American Review* unique in the way the essays contextualise Baraka's poetics. A famous controversy is over the poem *Somebody Blew up America*, criticised because it located the twin towers attack within a wider imperialist field, asking geopolitical questions about American and Israeli acts of terrorism.

More urgently, Baraka's earlier writings and activities express misogynist and homophobic sentiments (even as they experiment).¹⁹⁸ Black feminist thinkers have dissected the misogyny of Baraka, often locating it within a prevalent masculinity of the black power movement:¹⁹⁹ marginalising black women, consistent with and encouraged by white (and liberal) supremacy.²⁰⁰ To some extent Baraka recognised this problem,²⁰¹ although some remain dissatisfied with his born again gender awareness.²⁰²

Baraka, art as material force, art as becoming

We want "poems that kill."
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
and take their weapons leaving them dead
with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland.²⁰³

"Black Art" is perhaps Baraka's most well known poem, from which he helped launch a militant sensibility for a black aesthetic of the Black Arts Movement, part of the wider Black Power Movement in the decades during and after Malcolm X's presence. Black Arts marked a definite shift to a radical and revolutionary response to white supremacy, especially after the violent attacks against the Civil Rights Movement. Baraka proposes killing racist police and destroying

¹⁹⁷ Patrick Roney, "The Paradox of Experience: Black Art and Black Idiom in the Work of Amiri Baraka," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 407.

¹⁹⁸ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 67, 240 and 330-34.

¹⁹⁹ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 96 and 106.

²⁰⁰ Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Verso, 1996), 18-19, 62-67 and 173.

²⁰¹ Amiri Baraka, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 16. Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of Leroy Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2012), xx.

²⁰² Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 345-46.

²⁰³ Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," *Chicken Bones: A Journal for Literary and Artistic African-American Themes*, <http://www.nathanielturner.com/blackart.htm> (accessed May 15, 2015).

with poetry, or with black aesthetics, a myriad of other oppressive forces within the lives of black people. The poem's militancy and anger "...is not displacing art by rage, but is rather struggling to invest art with more power."²⁰⁴ The voice of "Black Art" is speaking back to itself: speaking to poetry as material force.

Another negroleader
on the steps of the white house one
kneeling between the sheriff's thighs
negotiating coolly for his people.
Aggh . . . stumbles across the room . . .
Put it on him, poem. Strip him naked
to the world!²⁰⁵

In solidarity with the intensifying desire for resistance among black people in America at the time, art becomes action against the politics of accommodation to structures of dominance. Even though Baraka held the necessity for art to maintain a formal self determination from the real, he avoids the threat of reifying art hanging over Adorno. Baraka's self determination includes a more literal grappling with the real, and he (and the Black Arts Movement) was less intimidated by the spectre of art as instrumental or functional and seemed to accept this as a risk that needed to be mediated by the aesthetic. Firing out of a necessity to experiment with the way art/thought deals with the real, is the necessity to experiment with ways that art/thought can actively cross into material struggle, using itself as weapon and strategy.

Revolutionary Art insists on the whole world as its measure and the equality of being. It demands and forces in the human consciousness the outline of the whole self of the world, it connects *is* and *be*. It proves their materiality.²⁰⁶

The urgency for struggle and its experiment was part of Baraka's challenge to the dominance of the real over art: even at the risk of producing works which could fall into didacticism. "Without the dissent, the struggle, the outside of the inside, the aesthetic is neither genuinely Black nor

²⁰⁴ Nita Kumar, "The Logic of Retribution," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 279.

²⁰⁵ Baraka, "Black Art."

²⁰⁶ Baraka, *Lecture on Revolutionary Poetry*.

Blue...”²⁰⁷ In this daring Baraka joins the legacy of other African diaspora writers and artists before and after him. The work of Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara, Aimé Césaire, Lorraine Hansberry, Patrick Chamoiseau, Toni Morrison, M1 of Dead Prez, James Baldwin and Frantz Fanon appear in this dissertation, offering moments of brilliance: where thought and art refuse to stay in their place and with risk and daring agitate across the border with “...a very real responsibility toward the world...which cannot be discharged through the creation of the poem as a separable, aestheticized object. The poem must produce active, material effects.”²⁰⁸

The effects do not reside in art’s ability to “change minds” or to provoke “...the audience or individual listener to action.”²⁰⁹ Art’s affect reverberates out from its specificity as art. Baraka called for an art that struggles to become the suffering, resistance, anger, fragility, smell, courage, beauty, terror, vulnerability and history of life for African Americans in the belly of the beast. Art “...should force change, it should be change.”²¹⁰ It must struggle to “scream”²¹¹ the militancy of black resistance and to feel the agony of real black life, while resisting it at the same time. Art should struggle to materialise as the “...power and immediacy of action.”²¹²

It should stagger through our universe correcting, insulting, preaching, spitting
craziness...but a craziness taught to us in our most rational moments.²¹³

Attitude/stance and imagination: forces for art becoming material

Blues People: Negro Music in White America is Baraka’s first published book (1963). It maps a trajectory of black music from the early days of slavery, back to the arrival of the first West Africans. While calling on history and earlier texts, Baraka’s tracings are guided by black music itself: from the early hollers piercing “lonely southern nights”²¹⁴ and the shouts of survival work songs directly derived from West African traditions, to tentative and thoughtful blues from the

²⁰⁷ Amiri Baraka, “The ‘Blues Aesthetic’ and the ‘Black Aesthetic’: Aesthetics as the Continuing Political History of a Culture,” *Black Music Journal* 11, no.2 (1991): 109.

²⁰⁸ Sherry Brennan, “On the Sound of Water: Amiri Baraka’s ‘Black Art’,” *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 301.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 308.

²¹⁰ Amiri Baraka, “The Revolutionary Theatre,” in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 236.

²¹¹ Daniel Won-gu Kim, “In the Tradition: Amiri Baraka, Black Liberation, and Avant-Garde Praxis in the U.S.” *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 346.

²¹² Kumar, “The Logic of Retribution,” 274.

²¹³ Baraka, “The Revolutionary,” 236.

²¹⁴ Baraka, *Blues People*, 157.

era directly after the official end of slavery (and the beginning of a new job market slavery), and finally the movement of blues into jazz (and the movement of black people from the south into the northern industrial zones) with its various stages, forms and transformations as it negotiated with the white world and its market system.

That it was the history of the Afro-American people as text, as tale, as story, as exposition, narrative...that the music was the score, the actually expressed creative orchestration, reflection of Afro-American life, our words, the libretto, to those actual, lived lives. That the music was an orchestrated, vocalized, hummed, chanted, blown, beaten, scattered, corollary...²¹⁵

The different stages of slavery, both as the “importation” of people, and a racist economic regime is a complicated history crossed by slave uprisings, the war against British colonial rule and later the civil war between northern and southern states. While there were whites who assisted the escape of slaves through the underground railway, slavery has to be understood as a major component of American capitalism and British colonialism, used as a “political football” by the white establishment: British encouragement to slaves who fled “rebel” farmers and landowners, the southern states for the preservation of free labour and a white supremacist heartbeat, and the northern states as source of labour for new industrial cities of the nineteenth century and a liberal, more refined racism. Baraka’s readings in *Blues People* base themselves in this context, not just for accuracy but to look for openings, cracks, tunnels and breaks in the river that black people used as possibilities for resistance and survival.

Baraka also writes about the specific isolation of north American slavery. He says that acquiring a slave was more “democratised” and affordable for poorer whites because of the particular set of economic circumstances of white settlement. This meant that newly arriving Africans who survived the terror of the journey would find themselves alone or among only a few other Africans. He contrasts this to the situation in central and south America where only richer landowners could afford slaves, resulting in large estates on which many Africans lived. Baraka notes that these different communal contexts played a role in the ability of Africans to nurture and sustain each other and their cultural practices. This in turn affected the development of new art and cultures they would create as they survived through the generations.

²¹⁵ Ibid, ix-x.

Blues People contains “beginnings”²¹⁶ in which Baraka moves towards sketching the social and political of his aesthetics. His theoretical turns in the book are complexly humble and tentative, and point to the kind of artworks and ideas he would later develop. As he unfolds his arguments he begins to create a conceptual language and a way of describing sensibilities that also continue to appear throughout his life’s work. These theorisations arise out of his concern to historically and socially understand the movement of black cultural creation away from its African cultural practices into “Americanisms.” Black Americanisms are aesthetic creations, “...expressing a western people, though an African-American one.”²¹⁷ They retain connections to the experience of life before kidnapping and during slavery.

The intimate domination of slavery meant that certain cultural practices survived more than others. Practices involving the creation of objects (carvings and weapons), drumming and the public worship of African deities were made impossible by the conditions of life and forbidden by white masters as signs of pride and revolt.²¹⁸ Practices and rituals which could be made more clandestine, like forms of singing and dancing, survived in a more sustained manner, even if their roles changed with the brutality of the new life and location, and the meeting of peoples from all over West Africa each with their own cultural practices.²¹⁹

If Negro music can be seen to be the result of certain attitudes, certain specific ways of thinking about the world (and only ultimately about the *ways* in which music can be made), then the basic hypothesis of this book is understood. The Negro’s music changed as he changed, reflecting shifting attitudes or...*consistent attitudes within changed contexts*.²²⁰

So while fishing, weaving and hunting songs continued, even while forbidden and even while less relevant in the menial forced labour of fields, they were eventually transformed into new work songs (retaining elements of form such as hollers and shouts). Their roles and content changed as Africans found ways to sustain through applying them to the new conditions.²²¹ So that West

²¹⁶ Ibid, xi.

²¹⁷ Baraka, “The ‘Blues Aesthetic’,” 102.

²¹⁸ Baraka, *Blues People*, 19.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 16-20.

²²⁰ Ibid, 153.

²²¹ Ibid, 20.

African songs became those of the conditions of forced labour, brutal exile and resistance, and spiritual worship became disguised as work songs. These roles and adaptations changed with each new generation as it engaged with social, political and economic conditions of the time.

That the music was explaining the history as the history was explaining the music.

And that both were expressions of and reflections of the people!²²²

As histories and lives moved through, legacies of cultural experiment and survival developed. For Baraka these legacies create ways of being, sensibilities and knowledge/s that are subjected to transformation, but which also in a self determined manner generate “attitude and stance:” certain ways of approaching cultural creation. For example, the entry of jazz musicians into a mainstream white world during the early twentieth century: the movement of black music into the white sphere and out of black worlds, not only produced new conditions and relations of power, but a need for new analysis, decision making and aesthetic negotiation. For Baraka these can fire into a thought system: a set of references from which self determined black art takes.

Music, as paradoxical as it might seem, is the result of thought...perfected at its most empirical, *i.e.*, as *attitude*, or *stance*. Thought is largely conditioned by reference; it is the result of consideration or speculation against reference...²²³

The invasion of European Christianity into the lives of Africans is one point Baraka uses to map the Americanisation of Africans and the Africanisation of America. With the birth of first generations in the new land, and a fuller immersion into the new life with no physical memory of Africa, Christianity accelerated the development of Americanisation. It must also be remembered that the kidnapping of Africans began in the early seventeenth century and continued for two hundred years. First generations and new arrivals continued to exist throughout this time and “...as late as the nineteenth century, pure African songs could be heard and pure African dances seen in the Southern United States.”²²⁴

But for Baraka “Christian” and “Secular” are not just about the temporal, or a difference in religiosity. Secular marks a quality which disrupts assimilation. Blues music (even as it took from African spiritual practices) is a secular music, remaining inaccessible and “strange.” On the other

²²² Ibid, x.

²²³ Ibid, 152.

²²⁴ Ibid, 19.

hand, especially after the end of slavery, the changing configurations of black Americanisms also influenced and effected mainstream (and non mainstream) white cultural creation. This is shown most clearly in Baraka's discussions about some types of jazz as more "American" or accessible for whites, accompanied by the increasing profile of black musicians in the white world.

Jazz...could make itself available as an emotional expression to the changing psyche of the "modern" Negro, just as in less expressive ways, it made itself available to the modern American white man.²²⁵

There have been many studies of blues and jazz as social and political forces. I would like to mention *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* by Angela Davis (1998): a layered feminist reading of blues through the works and lives of these three legendary blues women. Davis maps the way they negotiated a newly accessible but limited white world, but also racist and patriarchal lyrics and stereotypes imposed on their artistic skill,²²⁶ as they aesthetically critiqued and transformed the blues itself, while exposing and denouncing socio-economic conditions with their own vocal arsenal of "attitude and stance."

...by taking up the activity and energy of a people, the history, economy, and struggle of a people, directly into the sound and force of the poem...to proceed by the spirit and material force that carries revolution itself.²²⁷

Baraka describes resistant methods within black musical creation, while mapping continuity back to African forms.²²⁸ Tone and emphasis become ways to transform expression (and therefore meaning), even while content remains the same. "Sliding" and "slurring" in blues lyrical form become a "blueing" of a vapid western diatonic scale. Improvisation in jazz and blues becomes resistant to time standardisation of commercial music and survives from West African techniques of call and response, live and improvised in the context of their enacting, different every time. About particular jazz musicians in the 1960s, Baraka writes that they restored,

²²⁵ Ibid, 141.

²²⁶ Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 26, 89, 142-43 and 175-80.

²²⁷ Brennan, "On the Sound," 309-10.

²²⁸ Baraka, *Blues People*, 24-25.

...to jazz its valid separation from, and anarchic disregard of, Western popular forms. They have used the music of the forties, with its jagged, exciting rhythms, as an initial reference and have restored the hegemony of the blues as the most important basic form in Afro-American music.²²⁹

Baraka names these experimental forms avant-garde “...for lack of a more specific term.”²³⁰ But very soon after, develops his argument into a conceptual understanding of a black aesthetic avant-garde. But in *Blues Peoples*, the “attitude and stance” of blues and jazz is itself a force, something of a methodology. Each chapter moves back and forth across times and locations with the political, artistic and economic, concerned to isolate and illustrate ways that artistic creation can materialise as disruption of the dominant. Sections delve and layer, mediate and qualify and then drop back out, beginning in another reality of another time and place.

Baraka’s own “Americanism” is a multitude of unique and specific forms and contents: the legacy of black literature before him (particularly of the Harlem Renaissance), black music (daring irreverence of jazz and the melancholy and vulnerability of Blues), African forms and European avant-garde movements. His poetry became famous for its militant, but careful and exposed thought process which dissected the English language, making it unrecognisable and threatening its very status/claim to be “English.” Many people have written about Baraka’s own “attitude and stance” as he systematically tried to make text on page a sonic force: to force text outside its own forms and into materiality of a/live. Black music, blues and jazz in particular take severe layered breaths through Baraka’s poetry and prose, and his essays increasingly experimented with a type of agitated and discontinuous form of scholarly writing.

...elliptical, disjunctive, darting attack, one very much at odds with the verbose rhythmic cascade generally associated with the so-called jazzy writing of Jack Kerouac. Just as jazz musicians converted stentorian Western concert instruments into vessels of spontaneous broken rhythms and lightfooted virility, Baraka used short prose to resonantly capture his most fleeting sense-impressions.²³¹

²²⁹ Ibid, 225.

²³⁰ Ibid, 224.

²³¹ Tate, “Vicious,” xv.

The sense makings or “sense-impressions” that Greg Tate reads in the prose of Baraka are generated by imagination as thought. For Baraka imagination is an engine of art, while also being expressed materially as art: “...perpetual vibrations of the mind in the world.”²³² It should hurt and wound both the object of its attack and in the way it disentangles and exposes black pain and contradiction. Imagination struggles to be collective (even while solitary) as it aims for autonomy from the logic of capitalism and white supremacy.

What is called the imagination (from image, magi, magic, magician, etc.) is a practical vector from the soul...and can be called on to solve all our “problems” ... the projection of ourselves past our sense of ourselves as “things.”²³³

Struggle with imagination is aesthetic self determination: moving objectification of marginalised people into agency of politicised creative process. “Imagination (image) is all possibility...And so begins that image’s use in the world. Possibility is what moves us.”²³⁴ While it is magical or intangible, it is also practical and material as it arises out of the context of struggle and pain and the need to solve the “problems” of injustice. Imagination must become aesthetic weaponry.

Notes on representation, the other miserable real

Representations colonize the mind and the imagination.²³⁵

The police car drives-by that particular community centre, in that particular neighbourhood on that day with arrogant elbows leaning outside the window of the car breaking the law. We may think we are doing digital storytelling inside, but the police have already rigged up a whole film shoot. It’s a one shot scene, panned out across a row of brown skinned or black men. Lined up, chained up, caught in the flashlight, suspicious, violent, dejected, present but pacified. Shots and scenes scattered throughout the image history of the western world from early colonial clips²³⁶ to hollywood regurgitations.

²³² Baraka, “The Revolutionary,” 238.

²³³ Ibid, 239.

²³⁴ Ibid, 239.

²³⁵ bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Class and Sex at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 110.

²³⁶ Seumas Milne, “The ‘Arab Spring’ and the West: Seven Lessons From History,” *The Guardian*, December 20, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/19/arab-spring-seven-lessons-from-history> (accessed July 25, 2016).

...how anything is represented is the means by which we think and feel about that thing, by which we apprehend it. The study of representation is more limited than the study of reality and yet it is also the study of one of the prime means by which we have any knowledge of reality.²³⁷

The community centre and a digital storytelling project can never be mistaken for a hiding place where politics can be disappeared. The police don't need to get out of the car and come into the centre. They don't even need to drive by. The scene they are shooting and its proliferation in culture is already embedded inside the very technology (and its usage) we may be producing and training with, even if we are making theatre or an open air installation. A system of lighting, a series of angles, a normalised high pitch "hysteria" of a woman's voice, a colonising close up or a stalking shot from that camera we are using or those sirens we are sampling. There are even cameras that shoot around corners now.²³⁸ And guns.²³⁹

...how social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life, that poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination (in housing, jobs, educational opportunity and so on) are shored up and instituted by representation.²⁴⁰

The warzones of representation²⁴¹ are as real as (and often realer than) the war zones of life. Conventional, mainstream and even alternative works of art, culture or media have continued to re/produce the violence of race, class and gender supremacy: creating false truths about those outside white male middle classness and perpetuating material systems of power.

Giving voice, increasing empathy or changing perceptions are dominating functions given to art in community arts: slogans that confuse "showing...with critique."²⁴² A consciousness of the need to aesthetically disrupt the very mechanics of oppressive representation is mostly absent. The practice I am theorising is not, for example, satisfied with professing awareness of oppressive

²³⁷ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), xiii.

²³⁸ Jonathon Fildes, "Laser Camera Takes Photos Around Corners," *BBC*, November 18, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11544037> (accessed May 24, 2015).

²³⁹ Mike Hanlon, "New Weapon System Shoots Around Corners," *Gizmag*, June 4, 2004, <http://www.gizmag.com/go/2576/> (accessed May 24, 2015).

²⁴⁰ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

²⁴¹ Isaac Saney, "The Case Against to Kill a Mockingbird," *Race Class* 45, no. 1 (2003): 104.

²⁴² hooks, *Reel to Real*, 81.

media images of young people, or negative depictions of Muslim women, and responding with the defensive tactics of trying to “change minds,” or challenge stereotypes with another “authentic” ethnic story packaged into hollywood formula.²⁴³

A distinction must be made between oppositional representations and romantically glorifying and valorizing...Visibility does not mean that certain images are inherently radical or progressive.²⁴⁴

bell hooks is one of many thinkers who has deconstructed the way representation creates material realities of power: truth constructions that perpetuate and re/create hierarchies of privilege.²⁴⁵ The uniqueness of hooks’ work lies in the constant struggle to theorise gender, race and class oppression as always in operation, in and out of each other’s realms, borrowing methods and wreaking havoc as public and private sufferings. The real of the material, is also about representation. Her writings, as they talk about life, cross in and out of art and culture. While she critiques she looks for moments of liberation that can also materialise as the real.

This filmic moment challenges our perceptions of blackness by engaging in a process of defamiliarization (the taking of a familiar image and depicting it in such a way that we look at it and see it differently).²⁴⁶

In Jim Jarmusch’s *Mystery Train*, a young woman and man disembark from an American train. They are both from Japan and speak with a character who seems to be a homeless black man. hooks identifies the moment when he begins to speak with them in Japanese as “defamiliarization:” estrangement of a normalised depiction of an underclass black man and his appearance in countless films. She observes the disruption of “...white violence...operating at the level of the construction of black identity...”²⁴⁷

At times hooks’ discussions recognise the need for a consciousness with form, but her emphasis is usually content. Absent in the discussion of this cinematic moment is the way it is expressed with form, like so many other moments by Jarmusch and the people he creates with: travelling, supple camera work creating landscapes away from stereotypes of “ghetto” and avoiding the

²⁴³ Example: Guido Gonzalez and S. Shakthidharan, “Riz,” *Curios Works*, <http://www.curiousworks.com.au/project/riz/> (accessed August 1, 2016).

²⁴⁴ hooks, *Reel to Real*, 48.

²⁴⁵ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 2.

²⁴⁶ hooks, *Reel to Real*, 124.

²⁴⁷ Kumar, “The Logic of Retribution,” 279.

locking of its residents into frames that resemble prison cells so prevalent in film depictions (the intimate speaking shadows of the rooftop residence and travelling street scenes in *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, 1999). Other scenes “empty” white America, while making frame and colour uncomfortable: avoiding the triumphalism of stagnant or aerial landscape shots that create the eternity of settler colonial fantasy.

...images of barbarity, which are at the same time documents of the civilised culture that produced them, assume authority and ownership of Indigenous identity by virtue of possessing technologies that enabled Westerners to visually capture the indigenous form.²⁴⁸

And an indigenous character appears across Jarmusch’s films without the dictate to fit into their narrative, and at odds with the frame which seems to bend and move for his presence: and without the false heroism of the three point lighting system as preserve and revelation of white supremacy marginalising in shadow or assimilating with a shining light on the forehead.²⁴⁹

The need for experimentation with form in community arts is intrinsically related to the urgency to work with people to disrupt systems of representation: both the violence they perpetuate in public life, and in more intimate constructions of the self. The details of form and their role in making false truths need to be brought into the realm of “social change” in community arts. In *The Matter of Images*, Richard Dyer references the breadth and political necessity of cultural criticism about representation, while also expressing a concern that much of it remains descriptive, without aiming to deconstruct the way representation builds itself.

The representation of women and other oppressed groups...still is, a relentless parade of insults. Anger, despair or contempt at these fuels ‘images of’ writing... Much image analysis seems only to demonstrate that everything is the same and it’s all awful. There is something deadly about such reductive work: it tells one little and thus does rather little politically. It is important not to lose the fire of ‘images of’ work but it needs to be tempered by considerations that get more nearly at the complexity and elusiveness, the real political difficulty, of representation.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Romaine Moreton, “Casting Shadows,” *Artlink* 30, no. 1 (2010): 88.

²⁴⁹ Dyer, *White*, 101-35.

²⁵⁰ Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 1-2.

Bringing a consciousness of working with form and experiment disrupts insidious and normalised methods in representation. Experimentation with form lessens the risk of community arts imitating or subjecting itself to the dictates of popular culture and its templates which spread themselves out over the world.²⁵¹ Form is not only important to be able to estrange, to *make strange* actual material injustice, it is also necessary to help locate oppression hiding in the standardised formulas we consume (and create) all the time. Do we use the same hovering, leeching angles over women or the same flood lighting and excessive whiteness so prevalent on TV? Even by accident? Why? And why shouldn't we? My research frames such forms and methods as paramilitary soldiers for material suffering, which also outdo the realness of the real.

I believe the principles and strategies I am proposing for community arts go beyond a descriptive denouncing of representation and offer ways to actively analyse the insidiousness of representation as a pillar of power, while inviting people to aesthetically enter the warzone to disrupt its machinery: analysis as critical production, using experimentation with form to intervene in the world of representation and imaginings. The focus on each moment of production as detailed and politicised, so that for example a shot is interrogated as a series of formal elements involved (distance, depth, colour, framing, light and the way they all overlap into each other) creates a stretch of possibility to analyse social and historical construction in representations, while creating other poetic sensory truths.

It is imperative that we work from oppositional and dignified launching grounds. And to make sure that people learn the media or the technology in a manner that avoids the friendly fire of so many community arts projects where because of an absence of working with form, well intentioned works of art reproduce objectification and violence-in-representation: even if they used collaborative methods.

The culture industry

Racist, sexist, classist representation is obviously not the preserve of the culture industry and its commodities, and existed way before the industry was born. Said's *Orientalism* and countless other anti colonial and feminist scholarly works have mapped histories of cultural oppression in the "high" art of Europe. My research refers to "popular" works and commercial commodities as

²⁵¹ Dyer, *White*, 3-4.

I think they are the major source of “culture” that people are exposed to: reality TV shows, internet pornography, Arabic pop and its (western mimicking) idiotic video clips or what seems to be the increasingly multinational and globalised world of soap drama production and export with its “family values” and freezing of social relations into corrupt and rigid representations of colour, wealth, poverty and reductive and insulting ideas about what is feminine.

Horkheimer and Adorno’s observations have played a central role in critical studies of popular culture, including pedagogy and adult education, both fields which cross over into community arts. I would like to briefly map some of their ideas, which focused mainly around the growing empire of film and “light music,” so as to allow some of their concepts to inform the dissertation. Their analysis of standardisation and homogenisation in form and method, speak to my research principle of creating unique works specific to their time, place and people.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote in critical opposition to the development of “light” culture as capitalist phenomenon and its class oppression, with some allusions to methods of gender deception. One of Horkheimer and Adorno’s central concerns was to undermine Kantian ideology, a grand/father of European colonialism and imperialism. But consistent with any serious recognition of colonialism and imperialism as central engines of western enlightenment, the contribution of colonial economic structures to the culture industry, both in “old worlds” and in occupied lands is absent. Huge empires of commodities produced in occupied lands or with stolen goods from occupied lands relied heavily on overt racist ideologies and years of colonial legacy way before the appearance of Nazism. This racism continues in the commodities of the industry, although often less overt. (Except that it is 2016 and Yves Saint Laurent has launched a perfume called Black Opium, with an advertisement featuring an anorexic white woman pouting against a jungle background).

So many of the writings on the culture industry vividly locate the theory in lived, literally “flesh” experience. At times these descriptions seem to come out of a somewhat brutal imagination, especially while describing the response of “the masses.” I agree with the general analysis of cultural commodities but stop short of making absolute conclusions about their reception and effects on people, something the various culture industry writings have been criticised for.

Contrary to accusations of elitism, Horkheimer and Adorno's opposition was not based on the actual popularity of music and film,²⁵² but on the fact that products of the industry did not, or could not²⁵³ resist their incorporation into the avaricious rise of cultural capitalism and its new tools of standardisation and homogenisation: "...totality of mass culture culminates in the demand that no one can be any different from itself."²⁵⁴ The culture industry as determined by formula (styles, effects, standard plots, super star and pop personalities) is not just about content, but more about the forms and methods used in the manufacture of products.

Adorno believed that industry products lacked the kind of "aesthetic structure"²⁵⁵ that could resist the dictates of the industry. Closing the gap between the peoples of the world in shiny (dull) versions of life and humanity, use methods of repetition, duplication and juxtaposition, devoid of conflictual (negative) structuration necessary to the political struggle of autonomous works. "The perfected similarity is the absolute difference."²⁵⁶ Such methods create standardised representations (with corresponding sentiments) where the illusion of a reconciled world is inscribed into cultural commodities, even while material suffering increases, supported and simultaneously created by the industry as a pillar of hegemony in the modern world.

The culture industry uses methods that aim to "realistically" represent the events of the material real, increasingly collapsing the line between culture and life with a kind of corrupt semblance (section five): a myth of bringing the real into culture, of blurring the lines between life and art. The most obvious now being the phenomenon of what is generally called "reality TV." For Adorno, film stands accused of spearheading such corrupt semblance.

Imagination is replaced by a mechanically relentless control mechanism which determines whether the latest imago to be distributed really represents an exact, accurate and reliable reflection of the relevant item of reality.²⁵⁷

²⁵² The very term "culture industry" was used to refer to the hegemonic nature of products, and to avoid the use of the word "mass" so as to differentiate it as a market driven industry and not a true reflection of the masses or the popular.

²⁵³ Miriam B. Hansen, "Introduction Adorno: 'Transparencies on Film' (1966)," *New German Critique* 24/25 (1981-1982): 187.

²⁵⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 109.

²⁵⁵ Andrae, "Adorno on Film."

²⁵⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 116.

²⁵⁷ Adorno, "The Schema," 64.

The obsession to depict constitutes a set up, something like an ambush that opens the way for the acceptance of the illusionary promises of the industry: whether it be fluorescent skin devoid of markings (and therefore character or individuality: until “freckles” are declared sexy through a new supermodel), a good husband, belief in American democracy as flawed but the best in existence, glaring white teeth or the sentiment that love can indeed save the day and maybe even an unruly and compulsive women.²⁵⁸ Products cease to be culture, and work as strategies to commodify people’s lives and desires, perpetuating stagnation and mystification of what life could actually become, killing the very idea of revolution as generator of life itself rather than the one manufactured and pre-packaged, ready for consumption.

“A cultural ‘commodity’ represents simultaneously the means of a confiscation, a mode of corruption, a simulacrum, and a sort of formal joke.”²⁵⁹ The collapsing line between culture and life also erases the line between leisure and labour, bringing people under the entertaining subjugation of predetermined choices on offer, while offering no other form that could expose, provoke, or even relieve the burdens of working life. Entertainment becomes an extension of working life (and literal dialogical art between humans, an extension of the “talk show” or the morning show or the late night live: section four). The very idea of leisure or life outside the market is manufactured into an “afterimage” of working life itself, mechanised, repetitive and normalised to the point of being cultish: inevitable fate.

The new ideology has the world as such as its subject. It exploits the cult of fact by describing bad existence with utmost exactitude in order to elevate it into the realm of facts...existence itself becomes a surrogate of meaning and justice.²⁶⁰

The focus on the real world while distorting that world, and the reduction of reality into a given set of facts on which the industry is the expert, contain a demand for obedience: for your own good. Obedience is demanded using a myriad of methods: humour, special effects, well intentioned life advice, fantasy, and “...style as objective...the wielding of power by the culture industry.”²⁶¹ These methods do not mask or attempt to hide anything. The opposite is true. The products of the culture industry deal with everything: all the issues, emotions, events, phenomena of life, but bring it all under the dictate of accepting what exists, while elevating to justice mere existence.

²⁵⁸ Adorno, *Critical Models*, trans. 63-69.

²⁵⁹ Nicole Brenez, “T.W. Adorno: Cinema in Spite of Itself,” *Cultural Studies Review* 13 (2007): 70.

²⁶⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 119.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 103.

The demand for obedience also offers the promise of uniqueness, which in fact is impossible under the conditions of standardisation and becomes “fake individuation.”²⁶² The industry as a new ideology and the driving force of capitalism becomes mama, baba, counsellor, guide, best friend, provocateur, fashion and love advisor. While providing nothing, it presents itself as existing for everything.

...society’s positive and negative provision - for those it administers as direct human solidarity in the world of honest folk. No one is forgotten, everywhere there are neighbors, social welfare officers. Dr Gillespies, and armchair philosophers with their hearts in the right place...²⁶³

And if you refuse to accept the good will of the industry (Oprah or the magazine advice page) then it is likely you deserve what you get. The authority of the industry over individuals and their subjectivities turns “...socially perpetuated wretchedness into remediable individual cases, unless even that is ruled out by the personal depravity of those concerned.”²⁶⁴

And if you are a person that has been allocated the last rotting rung of hierarchy, the constant and standardised murder, rape and abuse you suffer in the commodities of the (globalised) industry are because you either haven’t accepted the rules of real life and/or your subservience is needed to demonstrate evil and the triumph of good (*Twelve Years a Slave*, 2013). Through your suffering you offer a salvation necessary to the survival of the rest of the world: that the forces of good will prevail despite and because of the historical brutality against you. And if at times the industry decides to “take the risk” of placing you in a representational time and place where rape and murder are not present, or perhaps delayed (*Monster’s Ball*, 2001) and you get to exist with a wider and more active repertoire of words and events, then you better be prepared to play the same deadly game, or “you’ll never work again.”

She knows tongue-suicide...is common among heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts, for they speak only...to force obedience.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Brenez, “T.W. Adorno: Cinema,” 73.

²⁶³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 121.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 121.

²⁶⁵ Toni Morrison, *The Nobel Lecture in Literature 1993* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), 15.

Four: critiquing literature and practice

Reading the literature

The English language literature on community arts and the wider field of socially engaged arts is vast. It contains a massive range of writings which not only come out of community development/welfare or art worlds, but also from pedagogy and adult education, philosophy and sociology, digital arts, urban studies, cultural studies, art education, anthropology and architecture.²⁶⁶ The literature leaks heavily out of scholarly research and is generated by different types of writers: curators, art critics, welfare/community workers and artists or organisations and political activists. There are books, government and NGO monographs and reports, conference papers, website write ups and articles across many different types of journals.

Many of the books from the more traditional field of community arts are compilations or curatorial collections of articles, each representing a project or organisation, often written by the practitioner, sometimes turned researcher like me. Some of these writings lack vigorous critical engagement with practice, or in Bishop's words do not "synthesise"²⁶⁷ with ideas. Others more critically analyse their work in a social and historical context. In the wider field of socially engaged art, the more scholarly writers sometimes cover the same projects, speaking to and against the ideas of each other.²⁶⁸ The mass majority of these projects are north American, European and Australian, as are the observers.

Reading the literature effectively meant reading about practice. This raised questions for research aiming to develop a theorised, poetic and oppositional program for community arts. Should I critically engage with projects featuring in the literature and artworks produced, or confine myself to ideas put forward? In *Artificial Hells* Claire Bishop critically challenges her own methodology and the ethics of a researcher engaging with the complicated, long term process of project making: the "hit and miss" risks and the commitment required.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Danielle Wyatt, Lachlan MacDowall and Martin Mulligan, "Critical Introduction: The Turn to Community in the Arts," *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5, no. 2-3 (2013): 82.

²⁶⁷ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 163 and 177.

²⁶⁸ Claire Bishop, Grant Kester and Miwon won Kwon.

²⁶⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 6.

I constantly pulled back from commenting on projects/artworks, trying to confine myself to ideas discussed. I found it precarious and sometimes false to comment on a project that happened in another time and place very far from this present research. And from my experience as a worker and coordinator I know that a community arts project can never be caught within the confines of representation: constantly crisscrossed with a multitude of energies and power structures. But with all the risk, it was impossible to mute my reactions to some of the projects and the artworks they produced. Critically speaking to ideas could not be detached from the need to critically speak to the practice/art often used to scaffold them. My colleague status gave this a more intimate dimension. Reading the literature was an agitated reading between ideas and practice, where the intent to understand what others think, kept crashing into what others do.

...the emerging history of social practice in contemporary art is being written without reference to a longer history of community-based arts, or to perspectives grounded outside of the western anglosphere...The stakes include the extent of...participation, the recognition of alternate traditions, aesthetics and values, the role of the artist (including the frequent privileging of the artist's ethical position), and the role of institutional interests in shaping social practice and its expression. Also at stake is the very shape and content of the arts themselves.²⁷⁰

Wyatt and colleagues list some of the problems with the literature and its ability to re/present power and privilege in the work. Their concerns make sense from the perspective of my research but not all of them have been addressed. While trying to grasp this vast field, its divergent directions and sources, it became clear I was somewhere on the margin (but not alone). A strange experience, because during the intensity of my working life I was sure my comrades (participants included) and I were at the centre of the world: grassroots collective art making struggling to escape domination of art and welfare, even while happening under the auspices of a development/government/art institution.

Reading the literature was also a difficult jolt back to western academia and the way it produces and presents knowledge, after years of working and living in a non western environment. The resistance framework of this research is imbued with lessons learnt from these years: resistance,

²⁷⁰ Wyatt et al., "Critical Introduction: The Turn," 86.

not as a fact to be discursively proven, but as a conscious part of the everyday. Under the devastations of neoliberal capitalism it survives for many peoples, as an inalienable fact of dignity, even if questions about *how* to resist and against *who* or *what*, have changed.²⁷¹ I read the literature with this framework of analysing the presence or absence of resistance, its forms or indeed the way it is often disappeared, while being claimed.

I actively looked for instances of aesthetic resistance during my readings. I found many claims that community arts or community based arts models (or “participation”) bring about change and sometimes resistance, but they were often grand pronouncements soaked in a humanism of predetermined assumptions about what dialogue or personal expression can achieve. Many of these claims were about participants and their alleged transformation, even when the “voices” of those participants were nowhere to be found in the project depiction.

My research program calls for community arts to create autonomous, self determined works which aim to disrupt the suffering of the real (material and representation). Sorting through which literature was relevant to my research, or which literature/field the research belonged to was difficult. It was necessary to find a way to engage that kept me close to the wall and under the shadow of my own research, where art is made “...not simply as personal expressions, but as interventions...about people’s resolve to overcome their oppression and dehumanisation.”²⁷²

Uncontained: Opening the Community Arts Project Archive, presents a social and artistic history of The Community Arts Project, located in Cape Town during apartheid years. This textual history is mapped around a series of works, some of them highly experimental, mostly using the linocut technique that became a form of grassroots peoples’ art. The text centralises the art of community arts, working back from its forms and contents into social and political struggle. This is a tentative and thoughtful text, which not only helped me map my own research direction, but also to embrace a context of resistant struggle for community arts. Other texts also helped critique “the field:” namely books and journal articles by Claire Bishop, Owen Kelly, Paul Chan, as well as journal articles by other scholars and community artists.

²⁷¹ Emil Maurice, “Curatorial Statement,” in *Uncontained: Opening the Community Arts Project Archive*, eds. Heidi Grunebaum and Emile Maurice (Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 2012), 14-15.

²⁷² Ibid, 14.

The interdisciplinary aspect of this research also means I have been grappling with other “fields,” trying to bring theory to agitate directly with practice. The following is a selection of writings that extract from the literature rather than claim to cover it comprehensively. There are writings throughout this dissertation that draw from the work of other community artists and critique practices taken from my working life. Combined with the following, they can be considered a general critique of community arts.

My engagement is like a series of borders crossings from the margins into established literature. The crossing aims to instigate singular analyses of writings, both their ideas and projects presented. From inside these sometimes textual case studies, I will unfold conceptual positions to help me step back into my own research struggle for a refreshed and more militant community arts. These relate to the object of art and the way it has been framed from a reception (rather than production) point of view, by the dominance of what I will argue are literal or didactic relational and dialogical methodologies for community arts.

Other points of reference consistent with my own research concerns help guide and confine this engagement: the way an absence of consciousness with form can reproduce the repression of social and historical representation in community arts; uncritical adherence to binary structures even while claiming to challenge communal/individual, process/object and social/art; and the falseness of claims about social or participant transformation as further chapters in a humanist narrative crowding out more resistant sensibilities for community arts.

Lounging in community arts literature, some questions

In a 2009 article Margaret Meban uses a UK project from Leeds, *Lounging on Red Couches: A Public Dialogue on Safety in Hyde Park* (May 28, 2005) to argue that “...the social aesthetic emanating from the realm of contemporary art provides a useful theoretical framework for art education.”²⁷³ The major concern of *Lounging* was the problem of safety in and around the Hyde Park of Leeds. In response the project initiated conversations between different people while seated on red lounges in the middle of the park. The project was initiated by Julie Fiala and Claire Blundell Jones (both visiting students) and occurred in partnership with a local safety

²⁷³ Margaret Meban, “The Aesthetic as a Process of Dialogical Interaction: A Case of Collective Art Praxis,” *Art Education* 62, no. 6 (2009): 33.

organisation and a Leeds cultural festival. Fiala, who “...embraces inter-personal connections and dialogue as both the medium and outcome of her work...,”²⁷⁴ is given authorship, even as Meban claims she is a co-participant rather than (privileged) artist. No other participant is consulted.

I would like to engage with this article to begin to draw out some critical concerns with the methodologies of what are generally described as relational or dialogical projects, and the literature which describes them. I will analyse this article with a series of questions, some of which will be developed in the next piece which critiques a more long term, sophisticated project and its representation. My distance from the lived trajectory of *Lounging* is exasperated by the author’s approach in which minimal information about the project is given, even as she uses it to make claims about empathetic identification, transformation, activism and resistance.

Empathy and listening

Meban begins by quoting some of the established observers of this practice: Nicolas Bourriaud, Suzi Gablik and Grant Kester. She also refers to Miwon Kwon, while not delineating Kwon’s more critical approach. Meban begins with intent to distance aesthetics away from reception/viewing of art (as object) possessing form (visual). Art is “...conceived as an inter-subjective process in which meaning is derived collectively. Inter-human relations and dialogue become a central part of the aesthetic process.”²⁷⁵

Drawing from an interview with Fiala, Meban’s first point locates the conversations as attempting to create “...a theatre of action generating the space for a *provisional community* of families, students, professionals and other community representatives to emerge.”²⁷⁶ For me this was the most thoughtful statement in the article, because it contains a critique of pre-packaged definitions of community and locates the project as part of wider strategies. While this latter strategy still invests community arts with a power to transform material social conditions, different to mine where transformation takes place in the realm of politicised imagination and training/production with form, this recognition by the artist is more critical when juxtaposed to the author’s claims for dialogical and relational methodologies.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 36.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 33.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 35.

Questions about the performative nature and the aesthetics of a project like *Lounging* remain. The very integral question of what makes it art, as opposed to a series of public conversations is never addressed? Why is it necessary that such a project be called art, rather than a series of strategic conversations among concerned people? Does this attachment to art run the risk of reifying and reproducing its elitist status? Is art superior to vigorous, challenging discussion?

And if we accept the artistic claim, what made these encounters aesthetic? Is an experience of speaking about an issue with someone you do not know instantly aesthetic? Meban doesn't address the way conversations may have been experienced by the people who took part. What were the aesthetic strategies or methods that made these conversations any different to those that can happen over breakfast between mother and daughter?

"As Kester proposes we need to consider dialogue as a creative medium through which the sociocultural matrix of our interactions...becomes a site for critical and creative reflection."²⁷⁷ If such literally social methods for art lead to transformative experience through reflection, how is transformation to be felt or understood? What kind of transformation is aesthetic in relation to other people, or in relation to feeling safe in a park? What kind of conversations took place? And why should conversation be trusted after years of theoretical challenges to language and its in/capacity to reflect meaning as opposed to propaganda and power? Why is this trust so implicit in many other project depictions and scholarly defences of such projects? How do we know that people will not repeat conservative, offensive ideas using dialogical language? And how do we know that people will be able to find a language to speak concerns or fears they want to express?

Does a person's desire to take part in a project (about safety or art) become contingent on relating to others they did not choose to speak or listen to? It could be safe to say that people who took part did so because of their concerns for safety, not because they wanted to dialogue. How was the decision made that "inter-human" dialogue and "post formal" aesthetic approaches to art were required to make change in the area of safety and security in the park? Has the trend in dialogical and relational become a coercive phenomenon in community arts?²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 36.

²⁷⁸ Amy Spiers, "Too Comfortable? Some Misgivings about the Social Turn in Contemporary Art," *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5, no. 2-3 (2013): 132 and 137.

And if the aim was to imagine a safer park, how does an orchestrated process of dialogue encourage imaginings? What are strategies a facilitator or artist needs to offer so that discussion becomes in the realm of imaginings? And what constitutes an imagining inside a conversation: what makes an utterance an imagining, rather than a statement or opinion? In Meban's account we are given no idea of imaginings that may have happened: either as content of conversation or form (structure, tone, volume, emphasis, pause, speed). There is no attempt to connect material happenings of the project to the claims of the article and to the reality of safety in the park.

Socio-political

...art practice as a *site* of transformative education...in which dialogical interaction, the ethics of self/Other relations, sociopolitical activism, and the re-insertion of art into the concerns of everyday life become paramount.²⁷⁹

The detail of what constitutes transformative education, or how the project positioned itself in relation to social and political activism is not dealt with by the author. We are also not told how socio-political awareness may have influenced the running of the project. How were conversations facilitated? How did they begin, the conflicts or problems? Was there a subject matter put forward? How were the voices of more confident participants managed, so as not to dominate those less accustomed to planned dialogical encounters, like council meetings and other public gatherings? Did non experienced dialoguers come? Did people who don't speak English come? Who took part? Did any perpetrators of the violence attend? Was the gender aspect of park violence on the agenda? Was there an agenda?

And while it was mentioned early in the article that lack of security in the park was a problem for young people and had a "racial aspect," these do not bear on the points of departure from which Meban writes. Who are the people causing the danger in the park? Why is it happening? What are the social or political issues and how did they determine the direction of the project? Is such a project merely a forum for people to talk about how they feel? Material dirty concerns of real safety could get in the way of such repeated slogans as "...recognizes our interconnectedness and relationality as human beings and the creative facilitation of dialogue as a means for social and political activism."²⁸⁰ How do such discursive group hugs come to bear on safety in the park?

²⁷⁹ Meban, "The Aesthetic," 35.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 34.

What role did participants play in the political and social decision making needed to approach the problem? And if indeed there was consensus among project organisers that a group of people or a community had to be formed through a dialogical project, did the project do its consultation or research first? Did it look for already formed gatherings about this issue, even if they are on the street corner or at the hairdresser? Did it seek out writings, actions, interviews, radio broadcasts that may have taken place or did it assume nothing has taken place; and that such a project was needed to fill a dialogical void among the people who use or relate to the park?

Today participation is used by business as a tool for improving efficiency and workforce morale; it is all-pervasive in the mass-media in the form of reality television; and it is a privileged medium for government funding agencies seeking to create the impression of social inclusion. Collaborative practices need to take this knot of conventions on board if they are to have critical bite.²⁸¹

Meban ignores the set up nature of the dialogical/relational: state, corporate or NGO organised manoeuvre, dictated by the limitations and requirements that come with institutions and their agendas (content) and schema (form). The dialogical seems to take place within a blurry fantastical red world in the middle of a park: an arrangement bordering on image/object. But because the object is magically wished away, so are evocations of red as a colour and some of its popular references (blood, desire or passion, red light districts, brothels, love, communism). The image in the article also shows the lounges facing each other, forming a private space within the public space of the park. This evokes other questions about whether the sessions were porous and open to passersby or not. This may have added a complex layer, but within this depiction an awareness of this “private” within a “public” is absent. The park as character (or location as character: a standard artistic concern in film and theatre), is also never considered.

Mass Communication

The mere fact of being collaborative, or participatory...is not enough to legitimise a work or guarantee its significance. It is more important to observe how it addresses...intervenes in...dominant conventions and relations of its time.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Jennifer Roche, “Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop,” *Community Arts Network* Reading Room (July 2006), http://wayback.archive-it.org/2077/20100906203946/http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/07/socially_engage.php (accessed July 6, 2016).

²⁸² Ibid.

Meban makes another claim that relational methods help critique mass communication. She refers to critical pedagogy and its methods of deconstructing culture industry commodities. "...pedagogical intervention is needed to examine, expose, and resist the pervasive influence of consumer culture ideology on our ways of being and acting in the world."²⁸³ Yes it is, but from here she moves directly to the claim that *Lounging* and similar projects offer this opportunity by opening up "free" time outside constraints of controlled communication zones. But how freedom can be worked for within the space of a project is not considered. And if a space is "liberated," how can it transform into critical exposure or resistance to consumer culture?

...artists devising social situations as a dematerialised, anti market, politically engaged...call to make art a more vital part of life. But the urgency of this *social* task has led to a situation in which socially collaborative practices are all perceived to be equally important *artistic* gestures of resistance...²⁸⁴

How consumer culture represents or speaks about safety in and around public parks is not referred to. What are the representations of criminality (its race and class) within mass communication and how do they come to bear on this project/context in Leeds? What role does consumer culture and its representations of violence in a park play in our lives and our relations to the park? Were any media stereotypes introduced into the dialogue? Was the real of the violence as opposed to its mythical aspects discussed? It seems that for many authors and supporters of such projects, the pure existence of dialoguing or relating is enough. What shifted or changed remains mystified. Empathy, transformation and resistance exist in a kind of supermarket language, and in the tradition of mass culture are disappeared one by one.

Dialogical salvation

Look at what we have inside the United States. We have young African, black and brown subjects...community colonial subjects being shot down in the street. In an obsessive kind of way. Fifty shots. Sixty shots. Laying on our stomach. In our back. As we run. Or as we walk or flee. In retreat from the scene...²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Meban, "The Aesthetic," 36.

²⁸⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 13.

²⁸⁵ Anastasia Churkina, "Ignorance is the Main Enemy of the US - Rapper M-1," *Russia Today TV (RT)*, February 12-13, 2011, <https://www.rt.com/news/rapper-m-1-media-identity/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

Onto the scene twenty years earlier steps Suzanne Lacy: high profile socially engaged artist. Along with other artists, community services/workers, schools/teachers and various state authorities she coordinated a ten year project with different groups of young people in Oakland's Bay Area in San Francisco, California. The different stages of The Oakland Projects were run by groups of T.E.A.M. (Teens, Education, Art and Media) and engaged various issues and problems in the lives of young black and Latino peoples using arts/culture, social research and community development activities. My interest is with two of the performances and their representation in the literature. In *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Grant Kester discusses both as examples of what he calls dialogical art. Both were staged on parking lot rooftops in Oakland's Bay Area, involving hundreds of young people.

Seated in parked cars under a twilight sky, they enacted a series of improvisational dialogues on the problems faced by young people of color in California: media stereotypes, racial profiling, underfunded public schools, and so on. More than a thousand Oakland residents, along with representatives of local and national news media, had been invited to "overhear" these conversations...²⁸⁶

The Roof is on Fire (1994) takes its name from an old school party chant, later used in a 1984 commercial hip hop track by Rock Master Scott and the Dynamic Three. Kester describes the major task given to the audience as overhearing, but in a slightly more critical review Hankwitz calls it "eavesdropping," out of her discomfort as part of a two thirds white audience voyeuristically listening from car to car.²⁸⁷

One of the aims of the overall project was to improve relations between police and young people. This was the focus of Code 33: Clear the Air, performed in 1999 after a series of monitored and locally televised discussions between police and youth in preparation. Code 33 seems to have been more crafted, unfolding over three acts.

²⁸⁶ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 4.

²⁸⁷ Molly Hankwitz, "Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby and Chris Johnson: The Roof is on Fire," *Art Papers*, January & February (1995): 39.

At the top of the garage there was the youth/police dialogue involving between 150 youth and 100 officers. On the next floor there were small group discussions of 30-35 groups. After this was over on the next floor down there were 80 people from eight different communities having a conversation with each other about what they had just witnessed and how it linked to their own community.²⁸⁸

This performance resonates strongly with my working life in south west Sydney (also around 1999) when a tendency in youth work of bringing young people and police together appeared: strangely coinciding with the official introduction of a New York style of zero tolerance policing by the NSW police force²⁸⁹ and the addition of “responsibilities” to the discourse of young people’s rights. Lacy and others repeatedly stress that the overall project arose out of “...analysis of the way in which the image of young people operates in California’s public culture...”²⁹⁰ and a concern with racist and classist stereotyping of young people by media and state institutions where “...youth operated politically as an image around which policy was made by various forms of manipulation of that image.”²⁹¹ These concerns were also a professed inspiration in Sydney against which decisions were made that dialogue between police and young people was needed.

“Is it...possible to conceive of an emancipatory model of dialogical interaction? And is there a way to understand this dialogue as a form of aesthetic experience?”²⁹² Kester takes the concept of the dialogical from the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. He says Bakhtin “...argued that the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation - a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view?”²⁹³ Kester extends Bakhtin’s idea of dialogic encounters in literature to the work of socially engaged art, where “...new insights: ideas emerge between speakers and not in the utterances of individuals.”²⁹⁴ He calls for an appraisal of the dialogical space, the between or the “intersections,”²⁹⁵ rather than emphasis on visual or formal aspects of any completed work or object. The “...process of performative

²⁸⁸ Suzanne Lacy and Grant Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue” (presentation at Seminar 1: Aesthetics and Ethics of Working in Public of the Working in Public Seminar Series, On the Edge Research and Public Art Resource+Research Scotland (PAR+RS), May 27, 2007), <https://ontheedgeresearch.org/s1-o-land-dialogue/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

²⁸⁹ Scott Poynting, “Ethnicising Criminality and Criminalising Ethnicity,” in *The Other Sydney: Communities, Identities and Inequalities in Western Sydney*, ed. Jock Collins and Scott Poynting (Melbourne: Common Ground Publishing, 2000), 64.

²⁹⁰ Lacy and Kester. “The Oakland Dialogue.”

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Kester, *Conversation*, 87.

²⁹³ Ibid, 10.

²⁹⁴ Malcolm Miles, “Aesthetics in a Time of Emergency,” *Third Text* 23, no. 4 (2009): 430.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 425.

interactions..."²⁹⁶ holds the key to understanding aesthetic value. For Kester a dialogical project removes interactions from their everyday social context, creating "outside" spaces that help to facilitate new aesthetic encounters and transformations among people who take part.

The Code 33 project...created a performative space in which the police and young people were encouraged to speak and listen outside the tensions that surround their typical interactions on the street and to look beyond their respective assumptions about each other.²⁹⁷

Interactions can happen within cohesive communities of people or across difference: between artist and community, different participants or project/performance and audience. Kester emphasises a type of "empathetic insight" generated by encounters, helping to create the difference of an outside space, but his discussion often lacks a complexity about how empathetic insight can happen across privilege and power.²⁹⁸

A major dialogical interaction discussed by Kester (and most other scholars) is between artist and participant. While acknowledging its context of power, Kester is drawn to the idea of a socially engaged artist surrendering their autonomy (framed as creative freedom) to the collaborative process. Others have questioned this reading, relocating the artist (and often the type of art created) as sanctioned within the very traditions they claim to work against, redefining them as creative bureaucrats (of state or art institutions), or the face of a new artistic welfare that placates or ameliorates the effects of neo liberalism in people's lives, making "humanity" rather than art.

...in the absence of the self-present artist-creator, the artistic persona often persists as the privileged centre around which discursive and material effects take shape. All too often participation accrues to the artist and the social dimension becomes an aesthetic backdrop to a successful career.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Kester, *Conversation*, 10.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 115.

²⁹⁹ Dean Kenning, "Art Relations and the Presence of Absence," *Third Text* 23, no. 4 (2009): 437.

Kenning writes that the artist, as a “present absence,” replaces the object of the art market, and the social becomes part of the service on offer. As I write I feel the need to refer to the point by Wyatt and colleagues about the domination of the art world in the literature. I believe this is one example of an old debate in traditional community arts about independence or cooption, mostly without reference to this other history.

Kester’s discussions about the role of the artist are contextualised within a general concern with “...complex ethical questions...that take them into unfamiliar spaces and contexts?”³⁰⁰ Using ideas from various European thinkers he considers ethics from two points of enquiry: “...an investigation of speech acts and dialogue and an investigation of intersubjective ethics and identity formation.”³⁰¹ Kester doesn’t formulate a clear ethical framework. Rather he seeks to problematise fixed notions to redefine ethics as a constant concern located in dialogical instances, developed by, while arising out of specific collective interactions of any project: a “discursive ethics.” This means understanding speaking away from a notion of universal knowledge, and not as a “...fixed, hierarchical system of a priori meaning...,”³⁰² while bringing ethical guidelines or models of “...intersubjective experience...into some strategic relationship to the quotidian practice of human interaction.”³⁰³

For Kester, the act of exchange and a “...perceived universality of the process of human communication itself...”³⁰⁴ challenges those taking part to be self reflexive and open to the other, so that shifts in identity and subjectivity can take place and transformations occur as people understand each other in more meaningful ways. This alleged acceptance of the universality of human communication is encouraged by the “performative rules”³⁰⁵ of any special dialogical art space. Kester claims that the specific, constructed rules of a project or performance “...insulate this discursive space from the coercion and inequality that constrain human communication in normal daily life.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁰ Kester, *Conversation*, 140.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 108.

³⁰² Ibid, 108.

³⁰³ Ibid, 123.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 109.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 109.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 109.

While there is no guarantee that these interactions will result in a consensus, we nonetheless endow them with a provisional authority that influences us toward mutual understanding and reconciliation.³⁰⁷

For both Kester and Lacy the ethical and the aesthetic are entwined. Kester believes that the “...aesthetic is an essentially ethical discourse...”³⁰⁸ and is concerned to understand the interactions of dialogical projects “...aesthetically, in the full meaning of aesthetics as a complex ethical, political and cultural discourse.”³⁰⁹ For Kester this entails a shift from “...a concept of art based on self-expression to one based on the ethics of communicative exchange.”³¹⁰ Lacy also emphasises the ethics of a dialogical process as they relate to the relational. In particular she discusses race as “...the biggest kind of ethical relational issue within this work...the one that I am most interested in and have been...from the beginning of my work.”³¹¹ But she also stresses an ethics of performance or the visual.

...the audience is...allowed to move rather freely and to have conversations on the side. There are ethical as well as formal aesthetic concerns about how people receive the information; how the audience is structured and moves through the space. There is a lot of attention to the visual.³¹²

While agreeing with Kester and Lacy that the aesthetic and ethical cannot be separated, I was left wondering about the selection process: from within their ethical delineations, which are centralised, and which are left to destiny? For both the dialogical and the visual/formal, I will argue that Lacy and Kester choose certain ethical concerns, while locking out others. This happens in the intersection between their consideration of structural power (as context of the project) and the accountability of the project to the suffering power brings about. An absence of accountability to the suffering of the real exposes serious inconsistency between the professed aims and desires of “dialogical art,” and its methodologies. In some way I am trying to hold the ethical aesthetics claimed for/by the project, to its activist intent:³¹³ different to what at times seems to be an essentialised escapism (or exceptionalism) for dialogical art in Kester’s work.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 110.

³⁰⁸ Lacy and Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue.”

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Kester, *Conversation*, 106.

³¹¹ Lacy and Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue.”

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Kester, *Conversation*, 11.

It is in the nature of dialogical projects to be impure, to represent a practical negotiation (self-reflexive but nonetheless compromised) around issues of power, identity, and difference, even as they strive toward something more...³¹⁴

My research meets with the work of Claire Bishop who has argued against uncritical assumptions, or a “natural” status of positivity and social change ascribed to dialogical and relational works. I find Bishop’s critiques vigorous and layered, and have used some of her questioning to help frame my arguments. But Bishop begins with art from art, whereas I begin with art from community arts (the social). While she considers the British community arts movement and the specificities of a pedagogical context (and in fact writes that it was the most difficult part of her analysing), she conceptualises from a perspective of spectatorship,³¹⁵ which in my research is suspended for a focus on production and training.

Dean Kenning argues that Bishop’s “external”³¹⁶ point of view limits social political analysis of the inside dynamics of projects. This runs the risk of reifying the aesthetic or artistic. He argues that Bishop may criticise a project for the tendency to reduce art “to an insipid inclusivity,”³¹⁷ but doesn’t necessarily recognise that this could be the result of its elitist or hierarchical mechanics, not only its artistic output.

Bishop’s concern with the *quality* of relations - the disruptive effects they have upon the individual viewer due to the inequality they present us with, rather than equality - and the possibilities of disturbing those unequal relations, derives from her wider concern to excise political judgements from art...³¹⁸

While I agree with Bishop’s adherence to art as antagonistic,³¹⁹ I would add that Bishop also tries to maintain a political distance or a reluctance to make art take a side, keeping antagonism and disruption in a kind of back and forth suspended movement. That somehow art can expose, but

³¹⁴ Ibid, 123.

³¹⁵ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 9.

³¹⁶ Kenning, “Art Relations,” 437.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 440.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 440.

³¹⁹ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004): 72-79. Bishop’s discussion of the work of artist Thomas Hirschhorn using the concept of antagonism as theorised by Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, as a perpetual and disruptive necessity of democracy.

should not get involved with the mess reality of political struggle (out in the world or inside the project). While Kester claims transformation, Bishop calls for a disruption that is reluctant to commit art. In some way this meets with Adorno's concerns of false commitment. But community arts is usually in intimate contact with suffering and its wounds. Concepts about art's disruptive and antagonistic strength must be challenged by its meeting with people on the margins, so that art takes the side of justice: takes active part in imaginatively undoing and not just exposing. My research has tried to relocate the ethical/social in this very place: the embracing of oppositional political consciousness, while still struggling for art's autonomy.

Lacy's works and writings feature regularly in the literature. She has presented at conferences, edited books and is the author of various essays and a doctoral thesis about The Oakland Projects. While Lacy offers some reflection, I have found no independent criticism of the project or the performances. This I think is partly because of the uncritical tendency in the literature about such relational and dialogical spectacles (about Lacy's work Miwon Kwon is an exception), but also because of the distance of this research from its happening. There would have been criticism from partners, young people involved, political activists or wider community members,³²⁰ but they are nowhere to be found in the mainly celebratory literature from which I draw: Lacy's website, essays, interviews and conference presentations, various websites of the project, media reports and the work of researchers and scholars, namely Kester.

A major way of knowing The Oakland Projects is through the documentation videos of different activities and performances. With these, one gets closer to the "voice" of the young people and their presence in the project. I often found their ways of speaking and its content more complex and politically resistant than the methodologies that seem to inform the performances. This is most clear in the preparatory meetings between young people and police that took place before Code 33 and in times when young people were individually interviewed. Of course these are selected and edited through a production process concerned to create particular ideas about the project, but the video documentation of the performances which would have been driven by the same desire, do not show the same vigorousness and complexity.

³²⁰ Suzanne Lacy and Tom Trevor, "The Oakland Dialogue" (presentation at Seminar 2: Representation and Power of the Working in Public Seminar Series, On the Edge Research and Public Art Resource+Research Scotland (PAR+RS), May 23, 2007), <https://ontheedgeresearch.org/seminar-2-the-oakland-dialogue/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

This I conjecture is related to what I will discuss as the literal, didactic and socially limiting methodologies brought to these performances: to the very ideas of art brought to a project that otherwise seems to have been informed by strong community development principles. The project led to the creation of an education kit for police sensitivity training, a young poet's group and contributed to youth sensitive state policy. Friendships were made between young people and police officers, but the project did not and could not (also according to Lacy³²¹), impact power structures of policing.³²²

I want to step carefully here. Later I will argue that the performances, in their form, reproduce elements of race and class oppression in representation. I do not want to add to this by discursively denying, understating, or making assumptions about the experience/contribution of young people. They are not the ones presented as coordinators/artists: it is Lacy's absent presence that dominates in the literature, even though youth and other artists/workers also have a presence. I will also argue that artistic decisions (even if by young people) sever the performances from legacies present in the resistance history of (black) America: the type of legacies I think community arts has an ethical responsibility to activate as part of the knowledge world of any project.

The too much real, or throw your hands up in the air

Police terror is an instrument of the state...It is a fear mechanism. But the police state is the control of the resources. It's the control of health care, the stifling of education, the current situation of the economy...the legislation and us not being able to put policy, real policy that's meaningful into people's lives that make it make sense...There are so many ways that the police state is implemented.³²³

Meanwhile during Code 33, downstairs at the bottom of the three story parking lot, Grant Kester is academically loitering in the area as the show begins, but with minimal risk of arrest or bodily harm since he is a white middle class man. He is observing a protest in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal and is unable to enter because the police have closed access to the show as they arrest

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Black Organizing Project, Public Counsel, and the ACLU of Northern California, *From Report Card to Criminal Record: Impact of Policing Oakland Youth*, August 2013, <http://www.blackorganizingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/FromReportCardtoCriminalRecordImpactofPolicingOaklandYouthFinalVer.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³²³ Churkina, "Ignorance is the Main Enemy of the US - Rapper M-1."

protestors and cordon off the area. The mostly white protestors were part of the movement to liberate Abu-Jamal,³²⁴ who at the time was on America's death row. Abu-Jamal is a journalist and intellectual opposed to capitalist supremacy and its imperialism. He was a member of the Black Panther Party (originated in Oakland) when he was arrested for the murder of a police officer in 1982. This came after fifteen years of direct and clandestine persecution of black power movements. Lawyers and activists have exposed discrepancies and corruption in the case against Abu-Jamal. From under imminent execution he has written essays and articles and issues audio communiqués that carefully unlayer social and economic injustice.³²⁵

The life and context of Abu-Jamal and his works could be considered rich inspiration (or teaching material) for a community arts project engaging with race and class oppression. But there is a sense that the protestors and their aims were considered a pesky and unwelcome interruption. After their arrival, negotiations between them and the organisers began. "Suzanne gave the *Free Mumia* protestors an opportunity to participate in Code 33 as a platform for their protest. Instead they chose to disrupt the event by exploiting the presence of the media..."³²⁶ Refusing the "opportunity" to be incorporated into the negotiations of Code 33, the protestors adhered to their right to protest. This is framed as manipulation by Douglas, and by Kester who describes their presence as "piggybacking." Lacy's position was different.

...most of us were *Free Mumia* activists. Most of us had the same position with one significant difference. We didn't believe that you *should not* interact with police around the situation; that you ignored them and that you adopted a protest mentality. So it was simply a difference in strategy.³²⁷

The refusal of the protestors to take part meant that a lockdown mentality took hold. On the advice of police, organisers cancelled act one: a procession of police cars in one direction around the parking lot, and low-rider cars in the other. The police concern that violence between white

³²⁴ International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal (ICFFMAJ) and the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC), *Free Mumia*, <http://www.freemumia.com/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³²⁵ Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Mumia Abu-Jamal's Radio Essays*, Podcast Audio, <http://mumiapodcast.libsyn.com/rss> (accessed 30 July, 2016).

³²⁶ Anne Douglas, "Perceptions of Quality: Quality as Use Value v Inherent Character" (presentation at Seminar 3: Quality and Imperfection of the Working in Public Seminar Series, On the Edge Research and Public Art Resource+Research Scotland (PAR+RS), May 27, 2007), <https://ontheedgeresearch.org/s3-summary/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³²⁷ Lacy and Kester, "The Oakland Dialogue."

protestors and low-rider owners would erupt was accepted by the organisers (and affirmed by Lacy in her certainty that low-rider owners would beat anyone up who leaned on their cars);³²⁸ as was the possible belligerence of the police who could not, even after all the dialoguing, be trusted to behave. “The police did what police do...”³²⁹ accepts the very reality of power and dominance that the performance claims to challenge.

These events and decisions seem to hold no political urgency, and certainly do not challenge the dialogical or relational. They are more of a chance to reflect on “imperfections” from the outside world: forces out of Lacy’s control. Any urgency for community arts to take control is disappeared. Lacy’s activism for Abu-Jamal is nowhere to be found in her reflections and the “present absence” of liberal humanism becomes clear: at odds with the many statements Lacy makes in her writings that she brings a radical past and politics to her work.

I was standing up there...looking down several floors at the Free Mumia protesters. They were just about to blow an entire three-years' worth of work, and I thought, “Ha! That is really interesting, isn't it?” It was a...disinterested bemusement on the inevitability of imperfection...and its complexities.³³⁰

At times Lacy and Kester demonstrate complexity in describing social historical context. Indeed this would be unavoidable while working in a place like Oakland with a strong legacy of radical activism and community work.³³¹ But I can’t help asking what this project would have been without the guidance and legitimacy of Oakland itself and the people who would have assisted in its development. And in representation, both Lacy and Kester seem to occupy a place of comfortable disconnection with the detail of life under race and class oppression. The detail, the real material feel of its wounds, its sadness, its possible moments of brilliance appear as issues, anecdotes and “fascinating”³³² scenes we get to watch through a kind of blissful white middle class/ness. They lack the kind of sentiment Spike Lee described as a “love” or more intimate

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Suzanne Lacy, “The Oakland Dialogue” (presentation at Seminar 3: Quality and Imperfection of the Working in Public Seminar Series, On the Edge Research and Public Art Resource+Research Scotland (PAR+RS), May 27, 2007), <https://ontheedgeresearch.org/s3-oakland-dialogue/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³³¹ Allan Creighton (Battered Women’s Alternative) and Paul Kivel (Oakland Men’s Project), *Helping Teens Stop Violence: A Practical Guide for Counselors, Educators and Parents* (California: Hunter House Inc, 1992). A text that offers critical community work activities that help expose and work against structures of power and privilege.

³³² Lacy and Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue.”

identification when critiquing the films of Tarantino and his representation of black people.³³³ Kester's "empathetic" is hard to find, while Lacy's reduction of a serious difference in political strategy between protest/fight or negotiate to a "simple" choice also reveals this complacency.

Lacy highlights the difference between Code 33 and the *Free Mumia* protest, but Kester prefers to assimilate into the dialogical so that the protest becomes another layer of "performative rhetorics," as does a disproportionate police response described by Kester as "notable."³³⁴ a move that seems to help avoid the ethics of holding the performance and his theorising accountable to structures of power and domination, even as they unfold before his eyes and even as he describes them. The fantasy, or as Adorno would say, the folklore of a dialogical arts projects has been disrupted by very real events of the area. But a fundamental question as to why art should be satisfied to try to mend wounds, rather than to work from its potential imaginary strength to dismantle their occurrence will not be addressed.

And even when the actual police props of the performance are used in suppression, and when its opening is delayed by police locking out audience in order to hunt down protestors who had entered (police "haphazardly" distinguishing between audience and protestors evoking the very real fact of profiling), there is no attempt to make this too much real challenge the dialogical. Rather Kester's analysis collapses into a "...a reified view of social structures as things that exist independently of human praxis."³³⁵ He then contrasts the benign police of the performance to aggressive ones downstairs, reducing them to a group of individuals devoid of their status as part of a force and a system that has life and death repercussions for people all over the world. Police are free to be dialogical and dominant at the same time, the project will not be disrupted by democratic expression and Kester's analysis will not be disturbed.

Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display...It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality.³³⁶

³³³ Morris W. O'Kelly, "We Owe Spike Lee a Huge Apology," *The Huffington Post*, March 24, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/morris-w-okelly/we-owe-spike-lee-a-huge-a_b_2528785.html (accessed May 4, 2016).

³³⁴ Kester, *Conversation*, 185.

³³⁵ Richard Dyer, "Stereotyping," in *Media and Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 354.

³³⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 116.

Kester attributes the large police presence/equipment for only 100-150 protestors as existing to safeguard the increasing gentrification of the area, attributing this opinion to a black journalist and resident of Oakland sceptically observing the scene. Here Kester offers no politicised opinion of his own. Gentrification is not contextualised within historic class inequality and its relation to racism. Instead Kester offers a reading of perceptions: "...the police are often viewed not as disinterested guardians of public safety but as a potential danger."³³⁷ Unfortunately this description that police are perceived as a threat, works like an attempt to mediate between "we" the (white) reader and the "natives" of Lacy's goodhearted dialogically intentioned project.

After a more historical and thoughtful discussion of the prison industrial complex, Kester jumps straight to the statement that Lacy's project was a success and "...no doubt led to real changes in the perceptions of both groups."³³⁸ But it's difficult to leave this observation with no doubt. No evidence has been provided, and even if it was and perceptions were changed, what really is the significance; and how can it shift any aspect of this pillar of the military industrial complex? Kester's depiction reifies Code 33 and does not hold the value of "changing perceptions" accountable to wider political and ethical complexities.

The tendency towards aesthetic re-privatization pulls the ground from under art in its attempts to conserve humanism.³³⁹

Structural forces are not denied; they are subsumed but wished away by the fantasy of the dialogical and its selection of ethical concerns. The problem of police abuse is actively discussed both in documentary material about the project, by Lacy, the young people and indeed admitted occasionally by some police officers.³⁴⁰ But it ends up working as a kind of lip service, as if it has nothing to do with the guts and the heart of the project, floating somewhere outside. Race and class oppression exist as structural forces, but not forces that one dare disrupt or resist with community arts. "Participatory projects in the social field therefore seem to operate with a twofold gesture of opposition and amelioration."³⁴¹

³³⁷ Kester, *Conversation*, 186.

³³⁸ Ibid, 187.

³³⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 143.

³⁴⁰ The Oakland Projects, *Hotspots (1998)*, Doco Drama, 1:05:48, <https://theoaklandprojects.wordpress.com/videos/youth-produced-video/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³⁴¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 12-13.

After criticising salvation tendencies in community work/arts and the reduction of social change to personal transformation among participants in his important article of 1995,³⁴² Kester reproduces the same tendency, ascribing a salvation to the dialogical. Satisfaction with changing a few perceptions must suffice and socio-political blows to the skin are managed by the dialogical. Fantasy/folklore is sustained, as is the contentment with an art comprised and damaged by the dictates of reason, the realistic and the “simple.” Kester claims awareness of race and class oppression and gives a sense of grassroots affinity, accusing others of modernist elitism,³⁴³ while the trick of a new kind of elitism in the name of the social, empties art of radical and independent potential before handing it over to the people.

What counts is to offer ameliorative solutions, however short-term, rather than the exposure of contradictory social truths.³⁴⁴

Again I repeat that it seems this project worked carefully with strong community principles and activities. I am not arguing absolutely against dialogical projects that bring people together, even across such drastic lines of power. Such activities could be useful in community development: but tentatively, as part of wider strategies, with the playing field levelled as much as possible before people sit together across the borders of power.³⁴⁵ I am arguing against working with art in a way that drains its potential to go to transformative places that reality cannot go: its struggle for what Baraka called a freedom principle, in content and form. I am not talking about a simplistic collapsing of revolution and art. I am trying to find a way that community arts can produce and teach art as disruption and opposition to the forces that control life and to work for “...an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality.”³⁴⁶

When watching the videos of young people trying to break through the intransigence of police officers, it became clear that an art with a more analytical, historical and resistant politics may have been welcomed by many of them. In the first ten minutes of a Code 33 workshop discussion, police officers adhering to slogans stuck firmly to their privilege (preferring to kill

³⁴² Grant Kester, “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art,” *Afterimage* 22, no. 6 (1995): 5-11.

³⁴³ Claire Bishop and Grant Kester, “Letter to the Editor: Another Turn,” *Artforum International* 44, no. 9 (2006): 22.

³⁴⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 275-76.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 19. Bishop makes a related point that many dialogical and relational projects, while claiming to transcend established traditions of art, do not critique their value or effect in relation to similar (community or political) projects taking place outside definitions of art.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 18.

than to go home dead), showing inability to understand their power position despite repeated attempts by the young people to help them.³⁴⁷ For the young people at times it seems not so much a dialogue, but a head banging against power.

As weeks went by young people expressed that sessions were improving: in a kind of happy ending created by the video, while also highlighting statements by young people that express frustration. “I haven’t had a single positive experience in my life with a police officer...well except for this little thing...which was...ughhh.”³⁴⁸ But throughout the various dialogues many young people (often young women), stood their ground, making arguments about power and privilege. Dissatisfaction, and at times sadness, exhaustion and frustration are evident and social art didactically and literally burdened by the real, begins to bang its own head, as those who bear the brunt of the real are pushed to the front line, while others gaze safely from behind.

I often found myself as interested in those conversations...as I was in the conversations that constitute the image of the project. Those laborious, difficult, messy, maybe even un-visual exchanges, to me, are central to the aesthetics of the piece...but they are of a different order aesthetically for me.³⁴⁹

Kester doesn’t note the young people’s analytical offerings, or their frustration, anger and weariness, or the persistent intransigence of most of the police officers; whether in the workshops or the performance. He asks no ethical questions about the content or form of these exchanges in their visual/un-visual, preferring to lounge in the “habitus” of the dialogical.

...policing as a performance is really crucial to the racial and class history of the United States...Intervening...and creating a different *habitus*, or a different space or a tableau...around those moments of interaction is really important.³⁵⁰

On the part of the police it was rare to find a universal adherence to Kester’s “moral equivalence.”³⁵¹ the one that brings about dialogical interaction that can transform subjectivity, or “...how consciousness is changed, remodelled, by sitting down together.”³⁵² What does a shift

³⁴⁷ The Oakland Projects, *Code 33 (1998-1999)*, Documentation Video, 52:59, <https://theoaklandprojects.wordpress.com/code-33-1998-99-vid/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Lacy and Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue.”

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Kester, *Conversation*, 149.

³⁵² Lacy and Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue.”

in consciousness mean if there is no disruption of power and privilege so that subjectivity can be “...forged in radical resistance to the *status quo*...”³⁵³ What can a shift in subjectivity be, if it doesn’t take on the complex ways we are constructed, or the forces of power that shape and determine our choices? And how can change happen without dissection of the way structures of domination encourage a building of identity on the loss of others?³⁵⁴ “...an ethics of interpersonal interaction comes to prevail over a politics of social justice.”³⁵⁵

Kester argues that part of the aesthetic ethical arises from the protagonists meeting outside their normal realm of everyday interaction.³⁵⁶ What may seem extraordinary or “outside” for Kester seems to have been another chapter in a predictable mundane story of power. Apart from the orchestration of bureaucratic, “safer” spaces by a project that seemed to access immense amounts of state and institutional resources and legitimisation, it was difficult to locate an “outside” that disrupted identities of power. Lacy has said that the conversations during the Code 33 performance were,

...a repositioning of the relationship between youth and police, to demonstrate that the police department took this issue seriously...These were meant to be an incursion into public sensibility, a media reframing, more than an experience of personal transformation...although of course some relationships did get a bit easier. Some cops did get a bit more relaxed around youth afterward.³⁵⁷

Kester’s outside space is nowhere to be felt in what seems to amount to a media and police public relations tactic, while transformation becomes small shifts towards civility. *Youth Cops and Video Tapes* documents other conversations between youth and police.³⁵⁸ These demonstrate more rigid encounters with police telling about their difficulties and young people repeating the fact that they are unfairly targeted. Reality is constantly reproduced and described. It is thrown back and forth, left intact and supreme: reinscribed onto the dialogical space straight from the street (or the home)³⁵⁹ of its everyday.

³⁵³ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 47.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 167.

³⁵⁵ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 25.

³⁵⁶ Kester, *Conversation*, 5.

³⁵⁷ Lacy and Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue.”

³⁵⁸ The Oakland Projects, *Youth, Cops and Videotape* (1995), Documentation Video, 17:06, <https://vimeo.com/39868715> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³⁵⁹ William K. Rashbaum, “Woman Dies After Police Mistakenly Raid Her Apartment,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/17/nyregion/woman-dies-after-police-mistakenly-raid-her-apartment.html> (accessed July 30, 2016).

A consciousness about the orchestration or “directed reality”³⁶⁰ of these performances is absent. Kester may claim that construction of this outside world is just that, but the project evoked questions for me about what must happen, or rather what are the methodologies a project can bring to a dialogical meeting space to make it disrupt the operation of the real. How can a project process embody its commitment (activist intent) and its accountability to real suffering? How could process be imagined (disrupted) so that it “directs” toward a meeting space where the real does not reign supreme: a different or more just space, from, and with which people interact.

What kind of analysis, theoretical or historical perspectives did project facilitators take to the context of conversing? In a place like Oakland these would have been present: off the documentation camera, in a time/place across the project. But apart from a comment by Lacy about whether officers should be in uniform, and the meaning of the colour blue, I could find no others about undermining power difference or aesthetically evening out the playing field to work for an “outside” space. Could police have been asked to police without guns, tasers or capsicum spray for a week before the conversations/performance? Or could they have agreed to young people watching them with cameras.³⁶¹ These could have been mounted during the performance, instead of, or alongside the “place” and “identity” videos made with young people. What if officers were locked into cars with young people standing around them talking, or asked to demonstrate physical restraining techniques on each other during the performance. And what about the oldest trick in the community work handbook: using role plays to reverse situations of power, even if they also run the risk of establishing a fantasy world of false reversal.³⁶²

The upshot is that idiosyncratic or controversial ideas are subdued and normalised in favour of a consensual behaviour upon whose irreproachable sensitivity we can all rationally agree.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 33.

³⁶¹ DJ Pangburn, “Futuristic Body Armor for Police Violence Activists,” *The Creators Project*, May 5, 2016, <http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/futuristic-body-armor-police-violence-activist> (accessed July 30, 2016). The Argus Project: Countersurveillance Armor for the Citizen Body, analyses the proliferation of surveillance hardware and tactics in poor neighbourhoods of colour in America. The project has created aesthetic armour that watches, records, protects: worn by Black Lives Matter and police monitoring activists. The Argus Project does not claim to be participatory, relational or dialogical. <http://theargusproject.squarespace.com/team/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

³⁶² The Oakland Projects, *Code 33 (1998-1999)*. These are used by the facilitator during the workshops between police and young people, but seem to remain in the frame of “understanding each other,” rather than power.

³⁶³ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 26.

Postscript

Vigorous community arts is complicated and cannot be wrapped up into conclusions or claims. It is important to remain humble and intensely self critical. Change Media provide a guide for constant self reflexivity that is social, historical and political, based on the perception that “...even the most well-intended community arts programmes can reinforce exclusion and provide distractions that stifle social change.”³⁶⁴ In developing these writings on the literature I found the generally uncritical approach bordering on humanist smugness. The claims and conclusions seem to speak more about white middle class fantasies rather than the achievements or value of such projects. When confined to journals and magazines, they can be considered benign within the wider world of representation.

If we look at the proliferation of collaborative art practices today, it seems that many no longer have the oppositional and anti-authoritarian punch they had in the late 1960s and 1970s - when radical theatre, community arts and critical pedagogy emerged in opposition to dominant modes of social control.³⁶⁵

But when such approaches are used among enthusiastic people looking to get involved in projects from which they can learn skills, challenge themselves or break the routine of their days, at the very least they become disappointing in what they offer and in how they challenge. Further on the continuum I would say such projects (and their depictions) run the risk of being irresponsible and comfortable with their comfort: offering themselves up as safe options for state and corporate funding crumbs. At their worst such projects reproduce the methodologies of race, class and gender oppression, while claiming to do the opposite.

In the past I have observed such projects and indeed been involved in some, while reproducing the same mistakes I describe here. In the end dissatisfaction echoed in conversations among members of the “community:” conversations I was privy to because for some projects I was a member of the “targeted” community. Often projects were only considered successful with the confident dialoguers among the participants/community who had invested themselves with the project and or the organisation that ran it, or by the local newspaper journalist or council

³⁶⁴ Jennifer Lyons-Reid and Carl Kuddell (Change Media), “Turn CACD on: Change Media’s Response to Current Community Art Trends,” *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5, no.2/3 (2013): 186.

³⁶⁵ Roche, “Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop.”

workers. Dubious success was often also clear in a strange excitement of inner city friends of the organisation, trekking out west on a train safari to be the majority of the audience and eat local ethnic delicacies. But for many “others,” projects were often unbearably white and middle class, imposing onto a set of already difficult social circumstances.

One particular show, *Subtopia*, by Urban Theatre Projects was staged in Bankstown in south western Sydney in 1999. It took place against a background of zero tolerance policing by the New South Wales police force in Bankstown and surrounding areas. The audience feasted on subcultures staged around the train station. It was the arrival of the audience-on-tour which was meant to activate each scene. In between, characters parodying pushy Vietnamese street hawkers made fools of themselves by mythically trying to sell (the Vietnamese community is one of the largest in the Bankstown area). The “fill-ins” were grotesque racist parodies of a difficult way to earn a living (even if they were trying to “show reality”).

Nothing is the same. The streets have been “transformed” - “reclaimed” by people who have never been here before. The sirens scream. A line of people...are up against the wall, legs spread...The spectacle slithers through their legs and moves out to cover the space.³⁶⁶

The mobilised state and media targeting of mostly Arab and Muslim young men and families was absent in this spectacle, dislocated from the local political urgencies of the time. For those of us engaged in public observation and intervention in the harassment of young people and in filing endless and useless complaints to the police ombudsman, the audience-allowed-to-loiter felt like an invading army, supporting passive complicity of local organisations and workers by their mostly white inner city friends.

Turning back from the dialogical into form and the visual (object)

One of the scaffolds on which Kester builds an argument for the dialogical is its difference to the object of art, as expression of “visual” or “formal” elements. Kester uses “visual” as a kind of vestige of modern art and its concern with form. He writes to “...anchor discourse not in some fixed representational order but in a process of open-ended dialogical interaction that is itself the ‘work’ of art.”³⁶⁷ The writings on the relational and dialogical often stress this “...interest in

³⁶⁶ Rose Nakad, “Review: Subtopian Walk,” *Artitude* 20 (1999): 13.

³⁶⁷ Kester, *Conversation*, 87.

the contingencies of a 'relationship between' - rather than the object itself."³⁶⁸ The object and its form are framed as symbolic and distant from the material real of social and political life. By extension the object is also defined as a site of individual or solitary contemplation. The social and collective of relational/dialogical art practices are framed as working against the isolating effects of the art object and its symbolism, and against the isolation of capitalism/modernity.

...the meaning of a given dialogical work is not centered in the physical condition of a single object or in the imaginative capacity of an individual viewer. Instead, the work is constituted as an ensemble of effects, operating at numerous points of discursive interaction.³⁶⁹

Bishops writes that projects calling on participatory methods such as the dialogical or the relational "...derive their critical value in opposition to more traditional, expressive and object-based modes of artistic practice."³⁷⁰ In the writings I have looked at, discussions do not usually specify what kind of objects they are writing against: paintings in a gallery, a school play, interactive computer games, a dance performance, a song or a mural. In general it seems this reaction against the object (and form) as the "...optical contemplation of an object, which is assumed to be passive and disengaged..."³⁷¹ is a reaction against elite objects of art and the aesthetic experience associated with them in traditions of European modernity. This reaction is nothing new and has been a focal point for many avant-garde art movements over the last century. In fact Kester draws similarity between dialogical art and avant-garde, but curiously omits a need for dialogical projects to maintain a central aim of most avant-garde movements to make works that disrupt normalised common sense/s of the real and representation.

While at times he recognises a need to analyse objects or performances created out of dialogical projects, my first problem with Kester's frame is that it separates visual/form away from dialogical interactions. In discussing the potential of art to "transform human consciousness," he writes that artists like Lacy seek to make art: "...not through the manipulation of representational codes in painting or sculpture, but through processes of dialogue and collaborative production."³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Bishop, "Antagonism," 62.

³⁶⁹ Kester, *Conversation*, 189.

³⁷⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19.

³⁷¹ Bishop, "Antagonism," 62.

³⁷² Kester, *Conversation*, 153.

Kester locates the aesthetic of dialogical art within human interactions, but avoids their “artistic” appraisal, replacing it with a (flawed) idea of ethics. This is Bishop’s core criticism of such projects. If interactions are to be announced as aesthetic, then what are the critical responsibilities that come with being “art” or entering the world of representation as art? Is it so easy to banish the visual or formal, especially across lines of power? Malcolm Miles writes that Kester complains such projects are criticised for not consciously working with the visual or formal. For Miles this seems to say,

...that such work is not reintegrated into the trajectory of modern art, the terms of which are aesthetic. Kester claims the status of art for this work...but simultaneously rejects the terms on which art is validated.³⁷³

This seems to be another manifestation of wishing for an outside, while under the wing of a dominant inside. Kester wants to claim art for the dialogical, but doesn’t want to consider what could make it artistic, or artistically ethical (or not) as art. Don’t dialogical interactions (whether we accept them as art or not), possess form and content, both as physical/tangible acts, and as the creation of sentiments or forces (symbolics)? Are they not also moments of object, bordered by time and place, and subject to the same social forces that come to bear on all art making? Kester locates the ethical/moral/transcendental capacity of dialogical interactions as art, while not appraising their artistic conceptualisation and the way that form and content will invariably play a part in creating the conditions that may come to produce such symbolic characteristics.

Form is...*how* a thing exists (or what a thing exists as)...Content is *why* a thing exists. Every thing has both these qualities; otherwise it could not (does not) exist. The art object has a special relationship between these two qualities, but they are not separable in any object.³⁷⁴

Kester’s framing also indirectly holds onto the privilege of the artist as the creator of a series of interactions: avoiding the very real threat of objectifying the “subjects” of those interactions or “manipulating them as codes.” Emptying the dialogical or the relational of form/visual has the capacity to in fact relieve an artist of the political responsibility to consider how they manipulate codes of representation while making art, especially when joining with vulnerable peoples.

³⁷³ Miles, “Aesthetics in a Time of Emergency,” 430.

³⁷⁴ Amiri Baraka, “Hunting is Not Those Heads on the Wall,” in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 200.

My concern is not that community arts be validated by established notions of art, but that it interrogates its form and content at all moments in any type of art it chooses to create, against its activist claims. Kester locates the ethical as existing in interactions that will transform, while not vigorously considering the determining artistic codes that create those interactions. My above discussion about conversations between police and young people attempted to draw out elements of their form as interactions, and to discuss the way their aesthetics seemed to fail the ethical/activist intent of the project. Another example lies in what seems to be the neglect of language as a site of aesthetic making: a strange omission about a project celebrating speech expression as a site of transformation. In her review of *The Roof* Hankwitz writes,

...separations were reiterated beyond the physical boundaries of cars... Language, at times an unrecognizable mixture of rap jargon and street talk, enhanced by an age gap, prevented total comprehension of what was being said.³⁷⁵

Even though speaking is the central methodology of performance and project, there is no discussion of young people's language (or police language) by Lacy and Kester, either during workshops or performances. Idiom or specific creations of language are never considered: local idioms and dialect of locales/neighbourhoods/age, always a result of cultural, historical and political factors in the life any location/grouping/community, barriers to the outside, while at the same time protective or resistant forces. Angela Davis traces the development of new languages during the early years of slavery as part of the origins of blues and black music: necessary to cross the divide of different mother tongues Africans brought with them. She describes the way black people planned escape and resistance through their own ways of speaking/singing, as the plantation overseer watched and listened, ignorant in his supremacist view that the slaves were happily singing as their labour made his master rich.³⁷⁶

It seems the young people brought their language to the performances, but the disavowal of object, leading to the making absent of form as part of aesthetic making, meant their ways (forms) of speaking are not considered in representations of the project. The video documentation does not feature local idioms unrecognisable to those of us outside. Were they

³⁷⁵ Hankwitz, "Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby," 39.

³⁷⁶ Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 167.

edited out of the videos? Why? Or did the young people edit themselves to fit into the project? How could language have become a conscious part of working for an outside through the way it can in fact disrupt communication itself, and the power and privilege of dominant language.

Let me inform you - *liebchen* - that we colored intellectuals lovingly use the idiom and inflection of our people for precisely the same reason. We happen to adore and find literary strength in its vitality, its sauciness and, sometimes, sheer poetry in its forms. Now why should that confuse you?³⁷⁷

Lorraine Hansberry presents the scene of a slick New York cocktail party of “progressives.” Taken from a short excerpt of work from a play unfinished before her passing in 1965, the words above are spoken by a black female intellectual in conversation with a white liberal acquaintance. Unable to think outside his assumed universality, he wonders about the way she speaks and demands her assimilation by asking her not to get “folksy.” Ignorant of his own ghetto status, he claims his language is different and that its usage adds something of value. In a series of manoeuvres Hansberry’s character exposes supremacy while asserting the freedom to be and create outside the gaze and stereotypes manufactured by whiteness.

Kester’s disavowal of object - and therefore the consideration of dialogical interaction as possessing form - misses rich opportunities for art making and critique. Again here it seems a case of too much real locked out of the dialogical: a local and already existing possibility for independent cultural creation was offered instead to “...a psychologist who looked at the language structure of kids in the groups and developed a master’s thesis on it.”³⁷⁸ For the art, the mere fact of young people speaking is deemed enough. The act of their utterance becomes a content bracket of dialogical salvation, and not considered in its own right a historical and social force of art making: a point that could disrupt a project itself, and its own methodologies (communication) to be moved and shaped by the specificities of the people it is working with.

The actors let the musical cadence of New Orleanian speech seep into the dialogue.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: An informal Autobiography of Lorraine Hansberry* (New York: Signet, 1970) 215.

³⁷⁸ Lacy and Kester, “The Oakland Dialogue.”

³⁷⁹ Paul Chan, “The Unthinkable Community,” *e-flux* 16 (May 2010), <https://web.archive.org/web/20140119224501/http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-unthinkable-community/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

On the other hand, the title of the performance Code 33: Clear the Air is taken straight from policing language, and the famous lines of Malcolm X, reinvigorated by Audre Lorde that the master's tools must be dismantled and new ones created, fall on deaf ears.

The art object in community arts is a possibility for production, not reception

My second problem with Kester's framing is the scaffolding of object (as form/visual) on the perspective of reception. Private symbolic spaces are identified from the point of view of contemplation and "...the imaginative capacity of an individual viewer."³⁸⁰ Dialogical is then easily defined as active and the object of art as eliciting passivity. This brings a reception view of the object, to a practice that claims agency for participants through collaborative production. For Kester dialogical projects,

...replace the conventional, "banking" style of art (to borrow a phrase from the educational theorist Paulo Freire) - in which the artist deposits an expressive content into a physical object, to be withdrawn later by the viewer - with a process of dialogue and collaboration.³⁸¹

I find this usage of Freire's idea to be another stretch in Kester's analysis.³⁸² Freire theorised from a desired pedagogical context of activity and agency. His views on cultural action sketch a need to support peoples to actively re/create the references of their own world. Drawing equivalence between Freire's arguments against a banking style of pedagogy and a pacified observation of objects avoids the integral centrality of production and the potential it creates for agency in community arts, while also surrendering the object to the bank. "Objects" in community arts exist to be produced before they are seen or received, even if their production process is infringed on from a hegemonic world of representation, "distribution and reception."³⁸³ Dialogical and relational aesthetics will always feel more "saintly"³⁸⁴ if they are juxtaposed against reception as a stagnant exercise of contemplation.

³⁸⁰ Kester, *Conversation*, 189.

³⁸¹ Ibid, 10.

³⁸² Miles, "Aesthetics in a Time of Emergency," 426.

³⁸³ Owen Kelly, *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (London: Comedia, 1984), 117.

³⁸⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 26.

While discussing Kant's theorising of aesthetics, Kester describes contemplation of an object as an experience of "...aesthetic perception by abstracting from the specific conditions of the object qua object to the object as representation..."³⁸⁵ But abstracting from the "specific conditions of an object" is impossible in community arts, which in fact determines the conditions of its production. Even if creating an abstract work, the social and political conditions of its making are real and material (as well as dialogical and relational).³⁸⁶ It seems conceptually flawed to mount an argument for the literally social and collective on theories of reception. If an object is collectively produced then how does it remain private or symbolic when social processes have invariably taken place in its production? What is absent from this framing of the object is a consciousness of (and skilling/training) production in community arts.

I do not wish to argue against the privileged status of the art object and the exclusionary history artists/projects want to oppose. Indeed this elite status is a constant threat to works of art that aim to be autonomous and resist market or established trends. When I used to believe it would be a good idea to take young people to museums and galleries, I learnt quickly that the object within the tradition of western art is mostly boring and imperialist. And when I became honest with myself I found the same gut reaction, with the rare occasion of works that compelled an aesthetic experience. And as I pass by galleries of "classic" paintings and modern art in Beirut, the same elitism and dislocation from the city and its inhabitants is obvious and where less than a five minute drive away poorer sections of the city live in very separate and faraway worlds.

But if we accept the denial of the object based on its power laden European (and colonial) history, it leaves questions about how its privilege and ability to dominate has been disrupted. How have we undermined its private symbolic space and the elitist tradition associated with it? How does its denial act as resistance, rather than surrender to established binaries and to elitist definitions of what an object or artefact is? I do not think the socially concerned scholars that write about community arts have theorised away or dislodged the elitism and capacity of artefacts to marginalise and keep intact power hierarchies. To some extent they have replaced elitism with wide eyed and simplistic approaches that pay lip service to changing power structures, but begin and end in methodologies sanctioned and promoted by systems of power.

³⁸⁵ Kester, *Conversation*, 108.

³⁸⁶ Kelly, *Community*, 60.

Positioning art worlds or art objects as the centre against which we conceptualise our strategies as cultural workers could speak more about the artist or the art institution, as opposed to the desires of those *they* are participating with: especially when such objects may be very much outside the material world of participants, and who may not care whether they go to a museum or not, or who may care more about objects from other legacies or cultures. Remaining is the reality that objects are not tucked away in the museum, but obsessive and dominant in culture industries of mass media and internet consumption. Most of them exercise their own power and elitism (in the name of the popular and the “real”) in a much more direct manner than the object hanging in a museum or an art gallery. This brings a responsibility to face the object head on and to consider how to disrupt the operation of its elitist or popular privilege.

In *Artificial Hells* Bishop also critiques the way that participatory projects posit their social and interactive aesthetic making, as contingent on the disavowal of the object and form. But Bishop’s “external” perspective holds an emphasis on spectatorship, and mainly considers the art created through an external frame of reception and circulation. At times she critically complicates her own points of reference. For example, the discussion of projects that she delineates as pedagogical, includes the limits of spectatorship and reception as a framework for considering art. But in general she seeks to analyse any given project from the perspective of,

...the meaning of what it produces, rather than attending solely to process. This result - the mediating object, concept, image or story - is the necessary link between the artist and a secondary audience (you and I, and everyone else who didn’t participate); the historical fact of our ineradicable presence requires an analysis of the politics of spectatorship, even - and especially - when participatory art wishes to disavow this.³⁸⁷

While I agree with Bishop that analysis of the art object (including a staged conversation) is important in any project (no matter how collaborative), for my research the importance of analysing the object lies not outside the project, but in what it reveals about the process of its making: how it speaks back into process. That consideration of an object of art must not be from a “pure” reception point of view, but from one that seeks to consider the process of its making. This does not mean I am denying the importance of considering the object out in the world and

³⁸⁷ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 9.

its accountability to or place in representation. Rather than this question of how it lives in the outside world must be asked back to the process itself and how social, political and historical critiques live in its methodologies: how it demonstrates its own accountability to oppressive social forces (real or representation) in its production and training methods and approaches. This is what I mean when I write about the “world” of a project.

Traditional community arts has always concerned itself with process and production, although often at the expense of the object to be produced. The dominance of the art world in the literature denies the history in community arts of struggling with the central debate between process and object/outcome.³⁸⁸ Any dedicated community artist anywhere in the world would have had this conversation in one form or another. The dialogical/relational repeats in a somewhat reified manner, social and collective principles that have always been taken to process in community arts: without the need to name all activities as “aesthetic.” Where more traditional community arts has sought to focus on the production of art/object by making process (skilling and extent of collaboration) a central focus,³⁸⁹ the participatory and dialogical seem to fix in place elitist definitions of the art object by juxtaposing them against a process of making “humanity.” In community arts, the social, or “humanity,” is a contextual reality of responsibility rather than artistic innovation (or slogan of participation), making it necessary to always consider the tension between objects created and the process of their production.³⁹⁰

Having said this, from my reading of project depictions of more traditional community arts (and from working life), I believe there is an almost complete absence of consciousness about the agency and power that working with form can offer community arts. The concern is mostly with content, resulting in didactic and realist depictions, which create art easily slotted into dominant forms of representation. And while engaging participants in process, also serves to leave reality and its suffering intact, rather than use the potential of art to disrupt. The next critical “case study” considers these problems in a project that claimed to work with form, but which constricted young people’s participation into content, resulting in artwork and process that seems to reproduce a (racist/classist) humanist desire for the world.

³⁸⁸ Graham Pitts and David Watt, “The Imaginary Conference,” *Artwork Magazine*, 50 (2011): 11. Errol Bray, *Playbuilding: A Guide for Group Creation of Plays with Young People* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1991), 90.

³⁸⁹ Kelly, *Community*, 109-10 and 132. Martin Thiele and Sally Marsden, *Engaging Art: The Artful Dodgers Studio. A Theoretical Model of Practice* (Victoria: Jesuit Social Services, 2003), 20 and 86.

³⁹⁰ Pitts and Watt, “The Imaginary Conference,” 12.

Debates about the outcome or the object in community arts, have instead been usually framed by notions of “quality,” as mediating or compromising democratic principles of process. While recognising elitist definitions of quality, which also come from aesthetic traditions in European modernity, the push and pull between process and outcome are often guided by this fraught notion.³⁹¹ My research shifts the emphasis and reframes a need for the art or the object to experiment with form, both for the object and as a guiding principle of a resistant process: this is where its “quality” lies, even at the risk of being “un-aesthetic” or “un-dialogical.”

At the centre of my research program is a conjecture that object and process have generally been locked into binary. That the claim to challenge the elitism and individualism of the object in favour of the literally collaborative, has in fact preserved the status of the object: the stagnant “noun” status that Baraka wrote about, and its dominance. Part of my difference to many of the scholars/practitioners I engage with is a beginning with the object as a possibility for production in community arts, rather than reception. My research refuses to choose from the binaries of object as individualistic/solitary and process (dialogical or otherwise) as social/collective. The next section of this dissertation will agitate borders to break object down into process: to take autonomous and disruptive qualities of art as object and bend them into praxis which struggles, in every moment, as production, pedagogy and politics (collectively and autonomously).

Form and the ethical/political

I would like to end here by extending the analysis of the visual/formal elements of *The Roof* and *Code 33*: to see them as objects defined and bordered, beholden to spectatorship, but to read them back into process. This will help the re/turn to object as a process of production, off the roof away from spectacle, and back to the workshop. Here I am also extending the ethical, in line with Kester, Lacy and myself that ethics and aesthetics are directly relevant to each other. My focus on the performances as a series of form/visual manoeuvres, also aims to centralise the question of how these choices work with/against the dominant world of representation. This is important in a project propelled by opposition to stereotypes and oppressive representations of youth, and which Kester claims is a dialogical space from which young people can “transcend” dominant representation.³⁹²

³⁹¹ Robyn Heks, “Community Arts: The Need.” *Community Arts National: Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (1987): 8-9.

³⁹² Kester, *Conversation*, 4.

Lacy has spoken of her work in connection to the tradition of the tableau vivant, expressing a common concern among these artists with the creation of a mise-en-scene for dialogical interaction that is as much spatial as visual.³⁹³

Kester writes that his focus on the “single dimension” of dialogical exchange neglects “...the significance of visual or sensory experience...the role played by color, space, and movement...”³⁹⁴ Elsewhere he adds other formal concerns of “framing and distance.”³⁹⁵ But because of the disavowal of the object, there is mostly an absence of discussion about the formal aesthetics of even the performances (as object). He argues that most critical engagements with such projects focus on the visual and formal at the expense of considering the aesthetics of interactions, but as discussed above this focus on interactions as somehow outside the formal, denies that relational or dialogical exchanges themselves are also “manipulation of representational codes.”

Katherine Gressel, in an article about *The Roof* asserts the importance of the visual and formal in dialogical and relational projects. The article descriptively celebrates some design and detail of the performance, and then collapses into familiar assumptions about the dialogical enabling “...discourse and social action.”³⁹⁶ Except for a statement ascribed to Lacy about young people on the roof being “looked up to”³⁹⁷ rather than down to, Gressel does not analyse form as a force within representation, even while (like everybody else) she commends the project for working against stereotypes. Calling on the writings of Bishop, she claims the performance disrupts dominant representation, but for Gressel this lies in its content. Formally, she is comfortable with the “...haunting familiarity of images on the evening news...”³⁹⁸ and the visual as spectacle. The only difference is the presence of the young people and the fact that they are speaking and seemingly in control of their words. Gressel’s “epiphany” (or Kester’s moral equivalence) is also evident in claims made about the young participants, even as none of them are interviewed or asked, Lacy being the only person Gressel interviewed.

³⁹³ Ibid, 189.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 12.

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 189.

³⁹⁶ Katherine Gressel, “The Aesthetics of Social Engagement: Suzanne Lacy’s ‘The Roof Is on Fire.’” *PART: Online Journal of the CUNY PhD Program in Art History* 12 (2006), <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/arhistory/part/part12/articles/gressel.html> (accessed 8 March 2012).

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

Roof was successful largely because of its potential to create such epiphany, for both the viewers of the event and its documentary and the participants who were lifted out of their normal sense of self.³⁹⁹

This verges on the patronising and further demonstrates the salvation status this project seems to occupy in the literature. Two paragraphs later Gressel runs away from the ethical accountability of speaking about others and the othered, with artistically sceptical statements about the ability of The Roof to impact on social structures or indeed to transform participants.

The disavowal of form and the visual denies the urgency of considering their manifestation as art in community arts. It helps manufacture a “reasonable” kind of common sense, firmly under the dominance of Lacy’s benchmarks of the American flag and bill of rights (without reference to their colonial and slave industry manufacture), where art’s primary role is to give voice to people on the margins: incorporating them, while decreeing that their interactions with the centre are based on “...the understanding that personal stories are how one enters civic discourse with dignity.”⁴⁰⁰ Art making with people on the margins must accept dialogical show and tell: must forget the central strength of art to autonomously and critically disrupt with its own formal creations, both as art/object and as a series of decisions and methodologies (process).

Gressel writes that “Lacy’s tight aesthetic control over her works contributes to their social impact.”⁴⁰¹ I critique these performances without knowing the extent of collaboration, how or who made certain decisions about form and content. I critique them as public works of art, arising out of a collaborative and pedagogical project, for which Lacy is the institutionally recognised artist and representative of The Oakland Projects, both artistically and academically. Another dimension in the dominance of her presence (and Kester’s) is the ease with which they speak about (and for) Oakland and the young people themselves, evoking not the popular phrasing across the literature of blurring reality and art, but privilege reproduced again and again, murky in its confusion about “...bringing the voiceless into the public sphere.”⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Suzanne Lacy, “Seeking an American Identity (Working Inward from the Margins),” *Animating Democracy*, <http://animatingdemocracy.org/publications/papers-essays-articles/arts-based-civic-dialogue> (accessed August 1, 2016).

⁴⁰¹ Gressel, “The Aesthetics of Social Engagement.”

⁴⁰² Lacy, “Seeking an American,” 15.

Headlights and helicopters, militarisation

Both *The Roof* and *Code 33* were lit with the headlights of cars used in their design and staging. This was also the case for act two in *Code 33*, on the second level of the parking lot, during which audience members interacted with each other and the performers. The cancelled processions of police cars and low-riders would have added another layer to the irresistible spectacle so many observers seem to be attracted to. But what would be the difference between this, and a daily procession of police cars in over policed neighbourhoods? How does a replanting of police cars (or indeed low-riders) in a performance not reproduce their idealisation as a vehicle of control (or glorified masculinity) and transform their social and political realities, rather than normalise them as fantasy or escapism?

As dusk approached the lights of the cars were turned on and *Code 33* was "...illuminated by the headlights of one hundred police cars."⁴⁰³ Were they surrounding the performers and/or the audience (siege), or lined up facing them (riot position)? Video documentation contains scenes where slashings of light whip across locations and faces as they speak. Meanwhile a police helicopter runs back and forth across the sky and from certain parts of the videos, seems to be flying quite low. A dance performance by young people happens right under its violent sonic.

Regardless of the strength or the position of the headlights onto the performance, the use of power from the source of power is an ethical question about form or the visual. How was the decision to use semi militarised light reconciled with the proclaimed intent of the project? How did these decisions work with social change aims? Is light neutral, not political and social at all?⁴⁰⁴ Young people are offered the choice to collaborate within the confines of dominant light (and colour). This not only denies a specific sensory experience of racism and its representation, but doubles it, brings it on within what is meant to be an "outside" space.

It was how the visual represents meaning - to media, to the audience and to the people participating. The cops had a lot of discussion about...with uniform or without...The discussion included the colour blue, the guns, the holsters...⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Kester, *Conversation*, 183.

⁴⁰⁴ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 82-83.

⁴⁰⁵ Lacy and Kester, "The Oakland Dialogue."

Even if Lacy and youth dialogued about light in workshops, how was the decision made to actually use such light in the performances: as opposed to, for example using it as a critical point of discussion in collective pedagogical production, about the way flashlights, headlights, helicopters have been used by police in the neighbourhood, by search parties for escaped slaves, by armies in war and in conventional representation. Even hollywood has visually exposed the terror of a black man caught in the headlights of the police or the Ku Klux Klan.

Why could police headlights not suddenly go off during the performance, instead of morphing into a helicopter and the glorification of power and its militarisation? Could lights have been aesthetically sabotaged by the guerrilla activities of urban action? Perhaps the protestors would have said yes if offered this role.

While everything above is loud and bright, everything below is whispers. And always the risk of coming up to find the cops stabbing their searchlights out across the water. And then everyone running, wet feet slapping against the concrete, yelling, Fuck You, officers, you Puto sucios, fuck You.⁴⁰⁶

Did Lacy and her colleagues want to make the point that not all headlights are bad? Perhaps she wanted young people to face their fear of lights, even as they wield their power. And how would this contrast with a parent (absent in the literature on the project, except as symbols of failed black parenting), warning their child to sense a headlight before the car appears. This is all conjecture, but the violent symbolics of militarised light and its real life violence is not.

Movement

In the Roof is on Fire young people sat inside cars as they talked: not on them, or on top, but enclosed and inside, while mostly white audience/eavesdroppers freely roam around outside, creating "...an uncomfortable sense of surveillance, or reminiscent of some conventional objectifying display of an 'other' culture."⁴⁰⁷ Gressel is not as uncomfortable with the situation as Hankwitz, collapsing reality TV with the performance which "...gave the event's audience a window into the 'real lives' of teenagers."⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ Junot Diaz, *Drown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 93.

⁴⁰⁷ Hankwitz, "Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby," 39.

⁴⁰⁸ Gressel, "The Aesthetics of Social Engagement."

In another sense, the brilliant performance vehicle of the car cum "living room" in which the teens sat comfortably "privatized" and protected from onlookers prevented "the audience" from intervening in any way in their conversations.⁴⁰⁹

Young people "privatized" in cars may have been understood as an interesting or different way to stage a performance and certainly the young people would have enjoyed (as would I) occupying the new cars they requested for the show.⁴¹⁰ But the decision of immobility, and except for speaking, static presence inside a vehicle (lest they loiter), is a decision with form that needs to be considered from its potential to pacify, while "protecting."

Cars are basically a framing device...to allow multiple private conversations...They are also the means to prevent the circulating adults in the team from impinging...We literally had to drag people's heads out of windows to keep them from saying, "God dammit, you said blah, blah."⁴¹¹

Lacy's uncritical appraisal of framing as a potential representational prison, also misses the problem of setting up a formal design which then had to be policed against her adult colleagues, and which diminished the "empowering" status from which young people spoke.

How does immobility (in a vehicle of mobility) speak historically and socially? Imprisonment through slavery was the first experience of Africans in America, sustained in the present by the prison industrial complex and its obsessive incarceration of black people. Movement has been an urgent part of strategies of survival and black resistance: crossing borders, fleeing from execution or arrest, educating, recruiting and networking to build movements and relationships severed by racial capitalism. Whether through the Underground Railway out of slavery, travelling blues musicians or the many activists, intellectuals and leaders very much known for their prolific travelling to black and working class communities, like Sojourner Truth (who gave herself this name), Paul Robeson and Malcolm X.

⁴⁰⁹ Hankwitz, "Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby," 39.

⁴¹⁰ Lacy and Kester, "The Oakland Dialogue."

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

These are references that perhaps could play a part in a different, more militant type of “transforming” that could help re/connect young people to inspiring or perhaps healing legacies that may exist through people, fragments of information or experience from their own families and communities. They can help to work with people to conceptualise art that is resistant from inside its world and its very way of becoming.

Object making, form and the disappearing of resistance

“The Aesthetics of Collaboration” by Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson (two community artists who feature regularly in the literature), begins with a conceptual discussion about the use of form in the making of objects. The authors begin the article with a statement about the history of community arts in the US and the UK and the increase and importance of “group” art making.

...in situations where there are ideas to be communicated more widely, aesthetic power becomes especially important - it is central to the work's ability to speak beyond the confines of any single group. The "beauty" of such images derives from...the distillation of the desires of a constituency in a form that expresses those ideas effectively...a transformation through critique, collaboration, and communication. It involves social and visual processes inextricably linked...the work forms a lens that creates a focal point in the energies of transformation.⁴¹²

Because of the rare mention of form, I suspended my apprehension about the ability of community arts to transform, and the uncritical collapsing of beauty and aesthetics. The authors stress that their commitment to collaboration is as much for “beauty,” as it is for social change. I was also willing to live an uneasy peace with the assumption that art in community arts must communicate, even though this is often a sign that participants have to speak to a white middle class bureaucratic outside, or an assumed/imagined audience who will “understand” art. This choice of expression is even more problematic when one considers the mention of European art movements Dadaism and Surrealism,⁴¹³ which questioned art as a communicator, more interested in disruption. The authors chose only to highlight the anti individualism of Dadaism and Surrealism, a reduction of both ideologies and their art practices.

⁴¹² Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, “The Aesthetics of Collaboration,” *Art Journal* 56, no. 1 (1997): 26.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 26.

The initial theoretical offerings begin to really break down when race and difference enter the discussion. While offering some kind of critique against understanding aesthetics as value free and neutral (words like power and privilege are not used), the authors describe colonisation as “...transcultural and assimilative of other cultural elements...”⁴¹⁴ They then write that European notions of aesthetics have become dominant, only to warn of the danger of being “...seduced by the romance of the marginal. It is also vital that we are able to have access to the local narratives of others. We need the common ground.”⁴¹⁵ This convenient wrapping up of cultural difference from the point of view of the omnipresent white “we” who must have access, later mutates into dictates imposed on a project with disadvantaged young people.

While faced with the spectre of simplicity and a benign smiling racism embedded in theoretical language, I was determined to remain interested in the authors’ ideas about form in community arts, the connection between social and visual (artistic) processes and the idea that the artwork to be created is a focal point for other forces: all three being related to my own research.

The authors continue by introducing their organisation, The Art of Change and the project Changing Places, a follow on from two previous projects “...which explored issues of culture and identity, commonality and difference.”⁴¹⁶ All projects were a result of collaboration between *The Art of Change*, the gallery and a secondary school on the Isle of Dogs: a marginalised area of “minority” peoples and under attack from the neo fascist British National Party. Approached by the gallery, the authors made the decision that participants must “change places” with the artists whose work appears in the gallery. This is their response to the observation that most of the young people had never visited a gallery. With more good intentions they describe their wish that young people relate to the Tate works “meaningfully” and in an empowering manner.

During a visit to the gallery the young people were asked to choose a work of art to which they had a gut response. Using “digital-imaging” technology, the artists then prescribed that participants keep the formal structure of the work and fill in their own content, “...recasting all of the iconography in terms of themselves, their cultures, and their environment.”⁴¹⁷ The project

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, 26.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, 26.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 28.

culminated in a group creation of a final piece, *Awakenings*, using the same method, and based on a work entitled *Resurrection, Cookham*, by Stanley Spencer. The authors choose this work on the basis that its many formal elements would provide opportunities for each student in the group to contribute, and because of its social and geographical continuities to the Isle of Dogs.

The centre of the image features “...African figures rising out of baked earth...” and a ship “...bearing mysterious objects...”⁴¹⁸ The authors did not consider the reference to slavery or the colour/light problem that the features of the black figures are less clear than those of the white characters and almost indistinguishable from the background: a classic move in colonial art. Instead they were attracted to the fact that Spencer’s brother was an anthropologist who had mounted the first exhibition of African art close by to the Isle of Dogs. None of these traditions of colonialism, or their Orientalism/s were cause for concern or critical inclusion, but rather melted into the pot of the authors’ conditional love for cultural difference, glossing over any political or social aspects that could give credence to their earlier attempts to be theoretically complex. Consistent with this is the positioning of the Tate Gallery’s collections, not as works,

...to be passively appreciated but as a rich source of material to feed the imaginations of participants....the collection became the medium through which the students could dream, visualize, and concretize possible futures.⁴¹⁹

This is a problematic statement to make about people whose voice or input is completely absent. Especially while no other sense of the young people is given: their thoughts or opinions about the gallery, British art, Britain, racism, misogyny or the project. European aesthetics, after being hesitantly critiqued, transforms into a kind of salvation, embedded inside a statement by the authors who do not feel the need to prove or justify it. These kinds of claims about those real material bodies/peoples that populate projects happen frequently in the literature, even while their voices are absent and even as a project claims to “give voice.” I am not advocating that project depictions interview participants and include their voices. Indeed this would come with more issues of truth and discursive distortion. The problem is not so much the absence of the community or participants in the literature. It is more a problem with the absence of a consciousness about their absence: and the absence of consciousness about the privilege one holds when writing about processes that were dependent on everybody.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 29.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, 28.

The other reading of these words, within the logic of the authors' earlier statements about the connection between the social and artistic, is that the aesthetics of European art must be the reference for those on the margins. That aesthetically, the young people should draw their structural and formal inspiration from European art. This is reflected in the assimilative process used in the facilitation of the art being made and the artworks created.

The approach used by the authors does not at all encourage the creation of new aesthetics or a new play with form specific to participants. The method of the artists decreed that form in the young people's work mimic that of the Tate gallery works. Not just using the same border frame, but also for the internal mapping of shapes and figures. The only change is pure content and young people are not challenged to question border or structure, only given the option to fill them in: to assimilate their own lives into dominant forms. The elite and exclusionary is re/centred and strengthened by making it the medium for the creativity of the other.

Participants are given the role of show and tell in the name of transformation and improving their lives. The role of critique, agitation and resistance to domination through art belongs to the theoretical writings of the authors (however humanist) and the need to understand these as forces for community arts, or as forces that should be shared and encouraged through projects is not recognised. This is also reflected in some of the detail of production provided by the authors, where consistency, balance and harmony reign.

By critical we mean that identities should not be prey to superficial stereotypes, that mechanisms and processes are established to allow lived, changing, complex, and problematized identities to emerge. For us, engagement is about empowerment...it is a political statement as much as an artistic one.⁴²⁰

The above quote seems dedicated to a non essentialist and complex definition of identity in flux and change. This type of identity (or non identity) has been theorised by Deleuze and Guattari in their major works and by the British intellectual Stuart Hall, one of his major ideas being about identity as always in production. bell hooks' treatise on the necessity to create new subjectivities that struggle against dominant ideas is also central to an understanding of non essentialist

⁴²⁰ Ibid, 27.

notions of identity that can defy “superficial stereotypes.” But it seems it is only the identities of the young people that must be challenged. Certainly the privileged identity of the Tate Gallery (and its association to the project) is never critiqued, even as vague statements about challenging western art are included. The only identity under the spotlight and against which we must not be “seduced” is that of the participants. The identities of the gallery, the artworks (as form and structure), the artists, the anthropology of Spencer’s brother in law and the racism of European art remain intact during praxis, rarefied, even as the authors claim otherwise.

While referring to identity as unfixed and changing, the discursive representation of the project and its pedagogy essentialises identities, and reinforces stereotypes. Participants’ lives are made didactic and stagnant. In an artwork displayed in the article from a previous project “East Meets West,” there are henna tattooed hands holding a pair of jeans under a sewing machine, poised as if posing for the image.⁴²¹ The artwork seems to have been produced with the same process and is bordered by a gallery frame, with the formal arrangement of its objects harmonious and conventionally balanced, promising peace and no trouble.

The very stagnant nature of identity the authors claim to stand against is reproduced and the life of the young (south east Asian) artist is represented without awareness of the risk of reproducing stereotypes, and without critical consciousness of the economic and social histories it references (the racialised and gendered exploitation of sweatshops and gendered domestic roles). I am not arguing that the lives of participants be removed as elements of making art. I am arguing that simple, didactic implanting of lives, into or with established forms can re/produce objectification of the people we work with and create art too easily digestible by culture industries and other systems that dominate our work.

Later I will theorise form in community arts as dependent on the local for content; the way local contents can be honoured through experimentation with form. I will argue that contrary to the tendency to create conventional or social realist depictions, this honouring lies in the way form can mediate or estrange content, removing it from the everyday dictates of the real and into other sensibilities and ways to disrupt the real. So that perhaps the sewing machine bleeds digital red or melts onto the table, as hands experiment with transforming poverty into a new dress out of scraps.

⁴²¹ Ibid, 28.

Self critique, woman rush

And then on another day, the absence of the gender question in my interrogations of community arts fell down like Said's sulphuric acid and hasn't stopped burning since. And while I am being critical of others, I must be critical of myself. The absence of research and theoretical offerings about how women and their concerns, especially young women, can be made invisible or tokenised in community arts is for me a serious flaw. My complicity sunk deeper, its edges always sharp in that very intimate way. I stupidly and suddenly felt I had missed the point: was doing the wrong research. The lip service to "getting" young/women involved. The big talk at the initial meeting or in the funding application collapses around the feet, dejected, stupid, useless.

Evening out the playing field, when boys get too comfortable

But why do you rap with an American accent? The word "nigger" is not allowed in this class.

Yeah but it's like the word "wog." It's normal now.

You come in here with an organised parade ready to instantly record, and you think the word "wog" is the same as the word "n...?" Does hip hop have ancestors? How many buckets of blood and sweat can live inside a breath between two words? Is hip hop from the country or the city? Does it smile or scream or howl? And what does it think of all the ass shaking going on its name? What does hip hop feel like? What could it smell like? What do you listen to?

What is flow? It's a force you have to chase, not that entertains you while you sit back lounging like an idiot in another video clip your grandmother would be ashamed of. Flow calls on your intelligence and your careful...listen.⁴²²

No, but it doesn't ask you to like it. It doesn't care. It asks for reflection. And if you don't like it, carefully think why and put a counter flow together. Or speak it. Draw it. We'll work on it now.

⁴²² Greg Tate, *What is Hip Hop*, Hip Hop Poetry, 5:46, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkOIVHnXsiQ> (accessed August 1, 2016).

Yeah, together. And yeah, get your feet off the table.

You have to move people and not with no "do it baby, do it baby, do it baby." Not like that...How do you actually reach the people with a message of profundity and not some kind of artificial garbage that comes out everyday on the hit parade? You know what I mean, you hear the lyrics to them songs, they say the same thing all the time...(begins pounding monotonously on the table)...and I could be saying: you're stupid, you're stupid! you're stupid!⁴²³

Can the best hip hop lyrics - the most original and interesting in what they say about the world - survive the formula of the standardised four bars of a love-me-buy-me beat? Do they have to?

You want to kill the beat?

Don't you need to find your own flow?

Yeah Tupac rapped about that.

What did he say?

⁴²³ Kalamu ya Salaam, "A Conversation with Amiri Baraka: 1998," *Modern American Poetry: Department of English, University of Illinois*, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/baraka/salaam.htm (accessed August 1, 2016).

Five: object becoming process/praxis

Art two, disrupting reception in community arts

Art agrees that for all its wonderment, mystique and even autonomy, it is always in danger of being imprisoned. Of being gazed upon, used, forgotten in the saturation. When holding the hand of establishment community arts, art remembers feeling useless and violated: guilty for dragging the whole group onto the stage, where the audience felt like strange scientists trying to drink the very stories churned out under a sweaty spotlight in the name of sharing. Art is aware of its dialogical or communicative alter egos, but within a world of corporate welfare, where agents of surveillance and control can easily be disguised as audience (even if they are loving parents and teachers), awareness is not enough.

And even in the projects/objects where the dictates and slogans of establishment community arts were defied and art maintained its autonomy, and even in the instances where the social workers were not allowed into the workshops; somebody, possibly the same artist or worker exploited art in the language of a funding application. While feeling some sympathy for the need to buy cameras, recording equipment or lunch, art starts to feel like it needs space: starts to feel like it may need a new kind of isolation.

Struggle to disrupt the real can be difficult, lonely and life/funding threatening. But art agrees to decentre itself as rarefied object: to put aside reception and needy audience. To forget the seductive danger of being admired or patronised, even for the sake of humanitarian purposes. To escape from the mutation of itself as mirror or explainer, art becomes a set of broken down, complex possibilities. Existing to be imagined, and created. It understands that away from elite technical skill and resources, it may need to be patient. It offers itself up, not as social sacrifice, but as a set of intensities: each one of production, pedagogy and oppositional politics. Art begins to imagine in on itself. It steps back into the time and place of its making, and locks the door while always in flight: "...withdrawal and retreat were not the last position."⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 5.

Baraka's hunting, object as process

In a 1966 essay Amiri Baraka steps right back from art as object, and into process as possibility, calling for "...the substitution of...artifact worship for the lightning awareness of the art process."⁴²⁵ At first I wished I was writing in 1966, when maybe the times felt better (or not): and when perhaps engagement with an essay titled "Hunting is Not Those Heads on the Wall" would be more comfortably distant from present gratuitousness and commercialised spectacle (and brutal reality) of beheadings. But even then it would have been necessary to remember that beheadings are not the preserve of modern or older Islamic conquest.

An early scene in Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), where a freedom fighter is executed by the French with a guillotine is watched through the eyes of hustler Ali la Pointe who will turn revolutionary. It gives a chilling clinical sense of the kind of terror that happened to Aboriginal resistance warrior Pemulwuy of the Bidjigal Clan, whose head is till now lost in the colonial "desiderata" of museums: the original act of savagery (1802), coloured again by a cultural imperialism eager to erase Pemulwuy's twelve year resistance war that repeatedly thwarted the development of the Parramatta colony during British invasion of what is today called Australia.

Amiri Baraka's hunting is of a different kind. And even though he believed in armed struggle as a legitimate revolutionary strategy, he also believed in a hunting which "...can transform and create."⁴²⁶ In this essay hunting is to disrupt the status of the object, while encouraging the struggle of process (possibility) that can produce heads "that kill." Baraka continues with his opposition to the object of European modern art discussed in *Blues People*: that "...huge junk heap of useless artifacts called Culture."⁴²⁷ The object is the remains of something else, of something other, subsumed by the cult of reception prevalent in western aesthetic tradition.

Going back before Europe's official marking of itself as modern, and in a classically Baraka turn, the idea of God/s is linked to nationalism and stagnation of western aesthetic reception, against which the "zoom" of experiment needs to struggle. During the time of the ancient Greeks, the

⁴²⁵ Amiri Baraka, "Hunting is Not Those Heads on the Wall," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 197.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 198.

⁴²⁷ Amiri Baraka, "LeRoi Jones Talking," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 204.

alleged beginning of European civilisation/humanism, the nominalisation of higher forces began and God/s became named: away from the importance of action (what Baraka calls a “verb-process”), into identification/ identity: “From the unknown verb, to the familiar artefact.”⁴²⁸ God/s also became increasingly imaged in the likeness of human beings, and the fear of an unknown is diminished. “Greek Gods are beautiful Greeks.”⁴²⁹

...but there is a *loss* with the loss of the unspecific imagination because knowing man was all there was enabled the less imaginative to show up fully armed. Man’s mind is revered and, in the ugliest emphasis, man’s inventions. Again the hideous artifact, to replace the valuable process.⁴³⁰

The movement from verb (action/process) to noun (object) becomes an engine of modern European nationalism, and its subsequent supremacy and expansion against others. What is seen or tangible is privileged, and process or action becomes invisible, mystified by the cult of human being: “...even though the process...is everywhere perceptible, the risk of perfection corrupts the lazy public into accepting the material *in place* of what it is only the remains of.”⁴³¹

Baraka’s essay, while challenging reception, also tries to animate and agitate it. The importance of object lies in what it reveals about the process of its production. While breaking the artefact down, the essay encourages active thought about objects, as a kind of production. “A museum is a curious graveyard of thinking.”⁴³² But if one decides to take a walk through, then how could observation (as a kind of production), expose the process of their creation. How do we look, smell, feel objects so that we struggle to understand possibilities that produced them?

Art is one of many products of thought...perhaps the most impressive one, but to revere art, and have no understanding of the process that forces it into existence, is finally not even to understand what art is.⁴³³

⁴²⁸ Baraka, “Hunting,” 202.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 202.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 202.

⁴³¹ Ibid, 197.

⁴³² Ibid, 198.

⁴³³ Ibid, 197.

Breaking art (object) down into thoughtful, critical possibilities for production is the central aim of the essay. Baraka's own artistic struggle to demystify object and to force noun into process/action used unestablished and unsanctioned configurations to disrupt poetry as object and the nationalism/supremacy of the English language. Scholars have noted the way his words and their configuration/s often scream off the page, becoming the sentiment of their writing.⁴³⁴

Art is like speech...a shadowy replica, of another operation, thought. And even to name something, is to wait for it in the place you think it will pass.⁴³⁵

Baraka talked about a perpetual dissatisfaction with poetry as lines on paper and increasingly turned to live performance of his poetry to agitate "noun" towards action as production. But even then, art (or music) in its live manifestation is not the possibility that produced it: even as it unfolds in-the-moment of what seems like its creation. Live is still a leftover of "... activity that makes itself possible. Music is what is left after what?"⁴³⁶ On the one hand Baraka argues for a "being-in," while also expressing distrust of that being-in and the danger of its objectification. We live in an era where the promise of "live" (riots, talent shows, executions) and the outwitting of time have been beaten to death while a camera rolls. "Art, like time, is the measurement of."⁴³⁷ The moment or "live" as measured by time still suppresses process (thought). Instead of time there is call for movement and its intensities in the essay.

..."using" words denies the full possibility of expression, which is...impossible, since it could not be stopped and identified. Art is identification, and the slowing-down for it. But hunting is *not* those heads on the wall.⁴³⁸

Possibility is thought: critical and oppositional, struggling to manifest as art. At times it seems like Baraka's writings about thought lack complexity, not contextualised within the very metaphysics he writes against: theory or thinking as the privileged side of a binary which subjugates body, woman and the non white. But in this essay he avoids association of thought with privilege, breaking it down into mediated, critical motions vulnerable to the real: like a struggle to defy the established sense of words, rather than to "wait in the place" where meanings usually pass.

⁴³⁴ Daniel Won-gu Kim, "In the Tradition: Amiri Baraka, Black Liberation, and Avant-Garde Praxis in the U.S." *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 346-48.

⁴³⁵ Baraka, "Hunting," 199.

⁴³⁶ Ibid, 198.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 199.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, 200.

...nothing that already exists is *that* valuable. The most valuable quality in life is the will to existence, the unconnected zoom, which finally becomes in anyone's hands whatever part of it he could collect.⁴³⁹

In Baraka's essay we get a sense of the difference between a "formalism" and experimentation with form. Breaking object down into process as experiment is "...to make words surprise themselves."⁴⁴⁰ There is no zoom in artworks interested only in the formal and an artefact "...made to cohere to preconceived forms, is almost devoid of this verb value."⁴⁴¹ Zoom is also at the core of possibility for dignified survival: a desire to activate the new, rather than be objectified by life. To become verb-in all actions, so that no output kills, mystifies or suppresses.

Introduction to the following writings

Adorno's almost impossible conditions for autonomous art can debilitate a theoretical attempt to put his ideas to work. I found myself measuring or testing artworks I have made with people, according to the demands he makes of authentic art. But comparison is often a flawed and futile exercise. Most of those works were not made in Adorno's Europe or the western world. Despite a parasitic influence of cultural imperialism, the works fight for their specificity: and many of the people who made them struggle to consciously practice and produce their difference. This has been one of the privileges of working with Palestinians in Lebanon who are generally politicised about their own struggle and often the world of others: both in material life and representation.

But the distance between the theorised ideas of Adorno and the actual reality of a community arts process is not just one about time and place. My research aims to disrupt conventional or established community arts, but many of Adorno's ideas are in direct and seemingly irreconcilable opposition to its actual existence: its aims, and of course the role it plays in welfare corporate structures and its discourses of transformation. Adorno wrote extensively against ascribing literally social functions to art and believed that autonomous art demonstrates change in society through its own logic: from within its internal aesthetic world it becomes change.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, 199.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 199-200.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 198.

Secondly, Adorno's theories are often drawn from art as object: the completed artefact. But even when it creates objects of art, community arts is a literally social process. Using Adorno's theories required a more complex approach to avoid a simplistic dumping of theory onto practice. It was necessary to venture back into Adorno's theorising about production: to read Adorno looking for the possibilities of process suggested by Baraka, and against the grain of a conventional framing of "autonomy" in community arts as individualistic and distant from the social.

...social decipherment of art must orient itself to production rather than being content with the study and classification of effects that for social reasons often totally diverge from the artworks and their objective social content.⁴⁴²

Reception wears autonomous art out, and reduces its ability to enact its own truth and therefore it's oppositional (and potential praxis) force. Reception operates in the reason world, and will fall short when trying to understand the mechanics of creating a (freer) aesthetic logic. Adorno may discuss reception, but his focus is also on the productive details and particularities of artworks.

The following writings agitate across two major conceptual borders historically relevant to community arts: object and production/process and art and social praxis. These binary sets are not exclusive. They often manifest as each other. At times my discussion separates only to find them crashing into the same critical reflection. The final writings of this section consciously bring them together into a series of practice features that make direct suggestions for process. Here there is a risk of contradicting my intentions, and synthesising into conclusions for process.

The middle writings agitate the border between art/object (even as dialogical interaction) and process. They help continue Baraka's disruption: to demystify and activate art/object. They use the work of all three thinkers to conceptualise autonomous art as a process of politics, training and production. They theoretically consider three "internal struggles" of art, while activating them as process in community arts: a struggle against description/depiction, and mediations of form and content and the particular and the whole. From these theoretical happenings I have looked for ways to move social and collective away from didactic and instrumentalised definitions, and to re/socialise community arts with principles of artistic autonomy.

⁴⁴² Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 228.

Adorno and Marcuse, agitating art and social praxis

The discussion begins on the border between art and social praxis. In *Aesthetic Theory* and *The Aesthetic Dimension* both authors stress irreconcilability between art and revolutionary praxis. At the same time, and out of particular manifestations of form, various lines of continuity (negative dialectic manoeuvres) bring them into the realm of each other, in "...affinity, and... opposition."⁴⁴³ Autonomous art holds the intention to stand against injustice. This is what it shares with radical praxis. But as discussed in section three, the realm of the aesthetic must remain free from the straight jacketing of the real and its forms and methods. Art can struggle to become a kind of praxis through its own aesthetic realm, but "...is more than praxis because by its aversion to praxis it simultaneously denounces the narrow untruth of the practical world."⁴⁴⁴

Labour

Much of Adorno and Marcuse's aesthetic theory revolves around the limits of art to effect direct change in the world. Art's transcendental location can easily be translated into privileged artefact of European enlightenment (autonomous wounds), unconcerned with material suffering. This threat of redundancy and/or hegemony is central to what defines art. Marcuse begins *The Aesthetic Dimension* with the limits of art in the face of an absolute cold reality.

It would be senseless to deny the element of despair inherent in this concern: the retreat into a world of fiction where existing conditions are changed and overcome only in the realm of the imagination.⁴⁴⁵

Labour is one mark of difference. If anti capitalist praxis struggles against the exploitation of labour in the production of commodities and unjust labour relations, in many ways the kind of labour entailed in the production of art represents a bourgeois form of labour which also contributes to art's reification. Irreconcilability along lines of labour serves to assert,

⁴⁴³ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 71.

⁴⁴⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 241.

⁴⁴⁵ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 7.

...the hard objectivity of the class struggle. The writers who, *as artists*, identify themselves with the proletariat still remain outsiders - no matter how much they renounce the aesthetic form in favor of direct expression and communication. They remain outsiders not because of their nonproletarian background, their remoteness from the process of material production, their "elitism," and so on, but because of the essential transcendence of art which makes the conflict between art and political praxis inevitable."⁴⁴⁶

For Marcuse, unjust relations of production so vital to capitalism's hegemony, including the dividing of labour along hierarchies of market logic, are further exasperated by art's difference. Art contributes to this regime, while also through its fraught status under modernism draws a kind of corrupt strength from it. Certainly in the culture industry these hierarchies of labour are maintained, and the labour of those involved (to different extents) is rarefied in comparison to the labour of a cleaner, a fruit picker or a worker in youth or women's refuge.

Discussion about the details of process or the inside mechanisms of a project's art making (as opposed to the external view that Bishop brings), is somewhat thin in the writings about socially engaged art. Definitions of relational/dialogic seem to lock analysis into their own literal dead ends, so that more difficult to discourse moments of artistic process are absent. When there is emphasis on process, it is often disconnected from the actual process of producing the art (or object). It is often not clear, even after extensive description, how exactly it was crafted: how decision making took place, what kind of skilling and training occurred. And amidst claims that the elite status of artist has been dislodged, the question of labour is rarely addressed. The presence of the artist in the community (rather than gallery or museum) and an automatic assumption that creative control has been surrendered are offered, without adequate detail about how the process challenged the privileged labour of artist.

...does the "creation" of a work mean the actual physical labor of making an art object (or component parts to a larger installation/event), or does it mean the conceptualization of a project?⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 37.

⁴⁴⁷ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), 125.

The artist is named and cited as initiator and author (even if collaboration is recognised), but there is no detail about how privileged status was actually challenged inside the process: and how this would manifest in its approach to different tasks and the thinking/action labour of creating the art. In discussing *Full Circle*, a 1992 project by Suzanne Lacy, Kwon draws a further distinction between “...rationalized bureaucratization of the decision making process...”⁴⁴⁸ (through steering or consultation committees) and sharing creative decision making.

The artist's delegation of decision-making duties is not really the same thing as sharing of authority. Only those with authority in the first place are in positions to delegate; that is, the act of delegating is in itself an act of authority.⁴⁴⁹

The process I am researching seeks to disrupt artist privilege from inside the process of making art: with intent to disrupt relations of production and the ways labour (and coordination) is divided and tasks completed. This is contingent on centralising conceptualising (labour/s of thinking) at all stages of art production (writing, recording, editing designing), as a collective and necessary concern for all participants. Not to fulfil a simplified notion of community or participation, but to strengthen the autonomy of the art being made and the process.

Community

Art is...the critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo and in its service.⁴⁵⁰

Community arts is a field which has traditionally stood against the privileged status of art (and artist). This can be considered a major intention, along with the wish to democratise access to technology and skills, and to redefine ideas of what is considered art.⁴⁵¹ The wider field of socially engaged art also claims a position against the reification of art. In both fields, protagonists claim their praxis works to undo the isolation and oppressive individualism of capitalism and/or modernity. Autonomy is often seen as an elitist or an anti social prescription, incompatible with

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, 118.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, 118.

⁴⁵⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 12.

⁴⁵¹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 177.

socially engaged art.⁴⁵² It is uncritically collapsed into high art, and locked into the object and its contemplation, while production belongs to an isolated individual artist. This is juxtaposed against literal collective production, or acts of dialogue and relating.

Indeed wherever we look, the allegedly solitary nature of the creative act melts in front of our gaze.⁴⁵³

While complexities in inter human communication are discussed, as they are in corporate handbooks and mental health training manuals, the very idea of communality is reduced to its most literal and didactic interpretation. The individualism propagated by capitalism is rallied against, but reinscribed into a process that takes its opposite as guide, so that simplified, harmonious versions of community (and art) are often the result: devoid of a necessity to create more complex understandings of the way art can agitate the divide between individual and collective,⁴⁵⁴ and across structural borders of power between different groups (a community of marginalised people and the state, organisation or artist; young people and police). Project depictions usually claim awareness of power and privilege across different groups “aesthetically” brought together, but as previously discussed it is not clear how this awareness has been theorised into the methodologies of art making and teaching.

The collectivism seems precarious and often reproduces the same phenomena that Marcuse criticised Marxist aesthetics for: objectifying subjectivity, turning it into a content bracket of class consciousness rather than one of its driving forces and a necessary element of sustaining political movements.⁴⁵⁵ Marcuse repositions the individual and the intimate against what he sees as falsified collective assertions of Marxist orthodoxy in politically committed art and the “...political devaluation of non-material forces, particularly of the individual consciousness...”⁴⁵⁶ For Marcuse subjectivity and its elements can be too easily relegated to psychology, de-historicised, and marginalised from within the concern of committed art. Mainstream Marxist art stands guilty of committing subjectivity to the regime of class, and not aiming to interrogate its complexity, both within and beyond class.

⁴⁵² Bret Schneider, “Autonomy in Conservative Times,” *Art & Education*, <http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/autonomy-in-conservative-times/> (accessed August 1, 2016).

⁴⁵³ Owen Kelly, *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (London: Comedia, 1984), 60.

⁴⁵⁴ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004): 67.

⁴⁵⁵ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 4.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

In representations of the Oakland Projects, the young people appear in the literature and documentation of the project, but their struggles are of no serious theoretical concern. They are, in the tradition of representative democracy and orthodox Marxist slogans, spoken for, written about, invoked when needed. Their subjectivities (political views, sentiments, histories) and how they affected the conceptualising and production of the art are subjugated for the "salvation" of the dialogical. The participants are objectively participant. And even though Kester thought that art was escaping from the museum, it seems the thieves merely removed the art and replaced it with the participants, and sometimes the whole community.

As he discusses individual literary works, Marcuse locates an oppositional potential of aesthetics in the necessity for new imaginings of resistant subjectivity. Committed art needs to practice the understanding that "...radical change must be rooted in the subjectivity of individuals themselves, in their intelligence and their passions, their drives and goals."⁴⁵⁷ He sees this as an urgent praxis necessity of art. This evokes Marcuse's earlier text *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, where he argued that capitalism was increasingly disappearing revolutionary thought/feeling with the increased capacity of commodity capitalism to dominate consciousness. Proliferation of consumer goods after World War II and the illusion of material comfort (as signs of justice), create a new type of personal fascism, a new reactionary self emerging under the conditions of advanced capitalism.

The framing of autonomy as opposed to the collective, and the relegation of form to aloneness, not only derives from a misreading of autonomy, denying its unavoidable attachment to the social, but also denies the possibility of collective autonomous practice. This is something my research is struggling for, and will develop further through the idea of the particular (in art) as a site of collective production. Further discussions will offer non literal or non didactic ways to consider the social and political continuities between autonomy and collective production and to reposition experimentation with form (as the creation of new sense, rather than the symbolic) as collective aesthetic weapon. This will attempt to avoid a framing of community as a harmonious and/or crudely material experience, understanding that it can also imprison and suffocate, leaving one searching for themselves and their desires.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, 3-4.

The problem of art collapsing into capitalist methodologies

Socially engaged art also claims to transform traditionally unartistic practices into aesthetic activities and to redefine notions of what is art. These often appear as a series of literal group activities, such as meetings, picnics, meals or online chat rooms. Bishop discusses the prevalence of a kind of blissful unawareness that many of these methodologies come straight from the oppressive structures such projects claim to stand against.

Even though participatory artists invariably stand against neoliberal capitalism, the values they impute to their work are understood formally (in terms of opposing individualism and the commodity object), without recognising that so many other aspects of this art practice dovetail even more perfectly with neoliberalism's recent forms (networks, mobility, project work...).⁴⁵⁸

In fact many relational and dialogical projects (and the literature that describe them) seem to be very comfortable with calling all sorts of processes and activities art, even when it is not clear exactly why or how they are aesthetic and where the "art" part resides in the "social." What makes activities artistic, as opposed to instrumental: and what kind of art is being called upon? And because the internal mechanics of production are mostly not made clear, with an emphasis on discourses of the social, the aesthetic seems to become an instant ameliorative: conjuring a simplified notion of art as praxis, while prescribing a literal and didactic social (and communal) that fits easily into (and collaborates with) existing power structures.

The mimicking of common sense, rational methodologies also serve to remove possibilities for imagination that can collectively create new sense making (with form) and disrupt the empirical. Paul Chan is an American artist who sometimes makes art that involves the participation of non art world people. The project I refer to happened in New Orleans, after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and during systematic government neglect. Chan is an exception in the way he sees acts of interaction or participation. He identifies as a political artist and doesn't hold any ambivalence about art and resistance in solidarity with each other. At the same time he avoids simplistic understandings of the collective and the social as art.

⁴⁵⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 277.

Chan sustains simultaneously two different registers of the political: as instrumentalised diplomacy, and as the suspension of this instrumentalisation in the autonomy of the work of art...rather than using art to bring about social change, he uses activist strategies to realise a work of art. The more common tendency for socially engaged artists is 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.⁴⁵⁹

Chan used many social methodologies of community work: teaching at two local colleges (for free because their art teachers had perished in the hurricane), meetings, consultations and pedagogical workshops outside the colleges. These were activities in their own right as socially, politically and ethically necessary, while remaining in their own realm: not everything is art and not everything needs to be art. They carry political and ethical responsibilities, not for art, but for themselves as happenings. Chan holds to art's autonomy and is the only socially engaged artist I have read about who takes Adorno's ideas to his work.

Praxis and art were not simplistically collapsed. Rather they were negotiated against each other as a performance of *Waiting for Goddard* was devised after an eight month period: staged across various devastated locations of New Orleans.⁴⁶⁰ Chan brought the idea of staging the play with him, but entered into a process that unfolded from one event to the next. Their trajectory informed the final "object," making it dependent on their unfolding. Both process and outcome evoke and contain ethical social questions. For Chan, one is political praxis and the other is political autonomous art. Each accepts the limits and the possibilities of their own realm. Chan avoids the reification of art and the social so prevalent in the field of socially engaged art.

Communal activities have always been methodologies in traditional community arts, without the need to call themselves art. Collective processes of art making must rely on such methods, but their reification as art seems to block any critique of how they must struggle against themselves as capitalist methodologies. The claim that such methods are artistically new, while being socially

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, 253.

⁴⁶⁰ Paul Chan, "The Unthinkable Community," *e-flux* 16 (May 2010), <https://web.archive.org/web/20140119224501/http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-unthinkable-community/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

able to transform, is a mythical humanist mirror that Horkheimer and Adorno so effectively dismantled in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Below Adorno is referring to accusations of irrationality against experimental art which struggles to maintain its difference to the logic of the real.

To accuse irrational art of irrationalism for playing a trick on the praxis-oriented rules of reason is in its own way no less ideological than the irrationality of official faith in art; it serves the needs of apparatchiks of every persuasion.⁴⁶¹

Faith in praxis is as irrational as an elitist faith in art. While claiming to be anti the elitism of art, many socially engaged projects reproduce its reification. Adorno is positing praxis not as object or noun, but as a way that reason conducts its business. Not only is praxis an effect of reason, it is also a methodology. Privileging the literally social at the expense of experimental and disruptive aesthetics, in the name of being anti elitist or democratic, reduces our work into the very systems (and their methods) we aim to stand against.

...the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness.⁴⁶²

The problem of isolation/individualism is reduced to people's inability to speak and relate to each other, rather than a result of structural forces that create self centred individualism or lonely isolation: patriarchy with its many violent and "peaceful" ways of imprisoning and isolating women, war, military occupation, incarceration, drug addiction, mental illness and people's cloning of their lives according to money and the market and their mutation under neoliberalism, a phenomena many have described as another kind of war and definitely militarised. The literature is not void of this analysis, but in its suggestions for community arts, seems to privilege the effect of oppression rather than the hearts of the matter, missing the opportunity for more radical work, and in some kind of crisis of mis/understanding the world it operates in. "According to its sheer form, praxis tends toward that which, in terms of its own logic, it should abolish..."⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 55.

⁴⁶² Bishop, "Antagonism," 67.

⁴⁶³ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 241.

The claims for art in socially engaged art demonstrate “irrationality of official faith” both in their diagnosis of the problem and in the accepted artistic/social value of literal acts of communication. The didactic turn of art as praxis, becomes less about transformation, and more amelioration or adjustment. If community arts wants to stand against capitalism and its oppressive manifestations, then the autonomous and disruptive potential of art has to be centralised, both as outcome (art/object) and process (social/praxis).

The basic thesis that art must be a factor in changing the world can easily turn into its opposite if the tension between art and radical praxis is flattened out so that art loses its own dimension for change.⁴⁶⁴

Adorno’s work holds a warning to the “apparatchiks” of participatory and relational art who direct their art making (whether object or relational) to finding solutions to problems that are a result of power and privilege and systems of historical oppression. And a popular idea that the process of a project (no matter how anti capitalist) could be an exercise or template for real life also needs to be questioned: “...just as art itself is objectively praxis as the cultivation of consciousness...it only becomes this by renouncing persuasion.”⁴⁶⁵

I want to recall the sadness and sense of defeat when participants re/turned to the suffering and isolation of drug addiction, crime/prison, or abusive fathers. The sadness was real. But defeat was illusory because I had understood what I was doing inside the uncritical frame that community arts can change and effect. Somebody could get engaged intensely with a project and this could assist in their own struggle to defeat drug addiction, but I do not think projects should hold material transformation of people or social context as central aims of the work.

“...it is better for art to come to a silent halt rather than to desert to the enemy and aid a development that is tantamount to integration into the status quo...”⁴⁶⁶ I came to a still precarious understanding that the best I could offer people was a process in which imagination could critically and politically exercise a resistant analytical freedom, step by step: from addiction, male violence, or the loneliness of political exile and dispossession. And in place of any prescription of how a project can materially change or affect anything, except within the artwork

⁴⁶⁴ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 35.

⁴⁶⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 243.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 320.

produced, I struggle to help facilitate intensities of critical production that may resonate later as fragment of a narrative that someone may patch together for their lives, perhaps as part of their own “...productive space for re-imagining the relationship between the work of art and the labour of despair.”⁴⁶⁷

Art and praxis moving toward each other

If the social praxis burden to change or persuade of anything outside the project is abandoned, and if didactic and conventional understandings of committed art are challenged, then perhaps a new space of “activist intent” can be theorised further from the directly social (and the pressure to find solutions and socially demonstrable results required by funders and organisations), and into the autonomously social possibilities of art, which “...need not apologize that it does not act directly, which it could not do even if it wanted to; the political effect even of so-called committed art is highly uncertain.”⁴⁶⁸

I am proposing that urgencies for change and transformation be turned around onto the artwork to be produced: that community arts attempt to carve out of each particular time and place a context of urgency and perhaps obstinacy.⁴⁶⁹ That the energies and talents, skills and knowledge that play in and out of any community arts process be directed towards change and resistance within the artwork itself and that a resistant praxis be drawn out of the process of its making.

“Praxis is not the effect of works; rather, it is encapsulated in their truth content. This is why commitment is able to become an aesthetic force of production.”⁴⁷⁰ Here in this obstinate statement from Adorno there is space to breathe in the negatively understood tension between art and its irreconcilability with praxis. Some room to consider continuities across revolutionary intention. Praxis lives in the way form stands against methodologies of reason, in the way it exposes and disrupts the operation of the real and its suffering. Autonomous art, in its elements of form and experiment, carries echoes (truth content) of a just praxis. “Abstaining from praxis, art becomes the schema of social praxis: Every authentic artwork is internally revolutionary.”⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷ Premesh Lalu, “Unemployment: Iterations of Nuance and Sadness,” in *Uncontained: Opening the Community Arts Project Archive*, eds. Heidi Grunebaum and Emile Maurice (Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 2012), 104.

⁴⁶⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 232.

⁴⁶⁹ Angela Y. Davis, “Marcuse's Legacies,” preface to *The New Left and the 1960s: Volume Three, Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 2005), x.

⁴⁷⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 246.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*, 228.

If for Adorno and Marcuse autonomous works of art, though their internal worlds reverberate as production forms of praxis, then how could the process of their making in community arts become a praxis which is also not didactic and never surrendering to the real. I want to re/theorise an agitation across the separation, and re/action ideas about autonomous art into principles for praxis to be actualised in moments of production and training. I want to theorise art making in community arts as its own type of praxis: but because it must use principles of autonomous art, such praxis will help to move art and praxis towards the realms of each other.

“Negation of practical life...is itself praxis, and indeed not simply on the basis of its genesis and the fact that, like every artifact, it is the result of activity.”⁴⁷² As discussed previously, art can never be separated from the real/social because it’s very existence (from within its difference) is dependent on and influenced by the social conditions of its context and production. Art’s privileged status does not place it outside the social: it is intrinsically linked and dependent, especially for its content. But for example, collectivisation of production or the transplanting of content from the real directly into art, as common sense anti capitalist “social” strategies, do not on their own move art and praxis towards each other.

“Just as its content is dynamic in itself....Art recapitulates praxis in itself, modified and in a sense neutralized, and by doing so it takes up positions toward reality.”⁴⁷³ Art points to praxis in the way it transforms content with form: dislodges it from the oppressive conditions of reason and the real, so that it defects to the autonomous anti/logic of art. In the next writings I will experiment with ways that community arts can practice commitment by liberating real life from the real. Being social by becoming aesthetically anti the social people are forced to live: both as form of art and the process of its training and production. These are launching grounds for later writings that attempt to practice (on paper) the breaking down of autonomous art into principles of autonomous and collective production, politics and pedagogy.

I am not denying the potential for autonomous art making in relational and dialogical projects, and in section four I offered suggestions for autonomous experiment with dialogical interactions. But from now my focus will be on object making. A closed in more “private” process (relational

⁴⁷² Ibid, 241.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 241.

and dialogical as it produces) can paradoxically open a freer space, because it accepts that its realm of operation is imagination. Not of a falsely free fantasy, but in the way that Baraka theorised, as a materialised element of oppositional aesthetic thought: imagination as struggle. Here my research meets with Claire Bishop's suggestion for a return to object (visual and form) making in participatory arts:⁴⁷⁴ except that object making in more grassroots or traditional community arts has never stopped. I do not wish to run from the elitism of art or the art object by replacing it with the didactically social. I want to look the elitism of the art object in the face, to theoretically dismantle its privilege, make it submit to collective politicised production by those not considered artists, using its autonomous and disruptive "freedom principle" as guide.

What appears in art as remote from the praxis of change demands recognition as a necessary element in a future praxis of liberation.⁴⁷⁵

The production of object is understood as a series of strategies, political decision making and technical production within a training context, around which detailed conceptualising and planning can take place. The object is not the provider of an isolated and individual aesthetic space, but helps carry a process that can resist and disrupt the real, while keeping the door to the workshop firmly locked so that establishment community arts/artists, social workers, feel good journalists and school principals who believe in collective punishment cannot get in.

Internal struggles, not telling the story to tell the story

The theories of Marcuse and Adorno need to be read within the context of orthodox artistic tendencies in Marxism. In particular, social/ist realism was/is considered the correct genre to convey and champion the stories, lives and struggles of the working classes. A realist or "natural" genre of cinema, theatre and literature also dominate in the culture industry, activist art and community arts. Frankfurt School dialecticians, especially Adorno, clashed with other communists who placed less emphasis on form and advocated content and its social realist depiction as a way for art to shed its bourgeois and elitist status.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 284.

⁴⁷⁵ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 32.

⁴⁷⁶ Adorno's debates with Lucács primarily regarding form and the genre of social realism as the proper genre for revolutionary works.

Art becomes social knowledge by grasping the essence, not by endlessly talking about it, illustrating it or somehow imitating it. Through its own figuration, art brings the essence into appearance in opposition to its own semblance.⁴⁷⁷

A major aspect of autonomy is a refusal to directly describe or depict the empirical and to struggle to express an essence (or political heart of the matter), through the particularities of a work. For Adorno and Marcuse didactic works of political art, no matter how committed, demonstrate revolutionary futility. Resemblance results in *semblance*: an appearance of reality, while mimicking and recreating its distortion and deception, "...mystified in its institutions and relationships, which make necessity into choice, and alienation into self-realization."⁴⁷⁸

Corrupt semblance resides in the way form/s taken from the real can deaden the content of art: beginnings, middles and ends, results and solutions, cause and effect or the question and answer of dialogue, time formulas and repetitive sections existing to dominate. Adorno and Marcuse's emphasis was mostly on these, but I have been alluding to others: such as dictatorial formula of camera angles and distance delivering a preordained message on character (especially gender roles) or narrative destiny, and colour and light with its largely racist symbolics and shadow preserved for the criminal, the dark/er, poor/er, or at best a mystery or fetish.⁴⁷⁹

The drive to imitate burdens the development of an artwork, and therefore its possibility to enact its social significance. Imitation is not only futile, but a capitulation to unjust forms of dominance, so that any other extraction of oppositional truth (or subjective experience) is killed. For socially and politically committed works, semblance betrays the original intention to stand against oppression, while also betraying the specific potentialities of struggle in the aesthetic realm. For the culture industry, semblance (and its illusionary representations) is one of its major dictatorial methods. Committed works of art (activist or NGO) are at risk of reproducing the same totalising hegemonic representations of material life under capitalism.

Only in the "illusory world" do things appear as what they are and what they can be. By virtue of this truth (which art alone can express in sensuous representation) the world is inverted - it is the given reality, the ordinary world which now appears as untrue, as false, as deceptive reality.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 283.

⁴⁷⁸ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 54.

⁴⁷⁹ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 110-16.

⁴⁸⁰ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 54.

Illusion and semblance

Both Adorno and Marcuse wrote of the necessary illusion quality of art: theorising the concept of illusion in different ways. Autonomous art needs to actively engage in the production of its own illusion worlds, using its own specific aesthetic (form) strategies. At the same time the illusion at the heart of all artworks is unavoidable as long as injustice continues. And so consistent with art's limits to affect the real, its attack on the lies/methods of the empirical is illusion itself, but a necessary one. Autonomous works, through the possibilities of form need to instigate a restructuring or distortion of reality within their internal worlds. Art needs to reject identification or harmonisation with the real in content and form, in order to expose the illusion of the empirical, as it instigates its own illusion.

The truth of art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e. of those who established it) to *define* what is *real*. In this rupture, which is the achievement of the aesthetic form, the fictitious world of art appears as true reality.⁴⁸¹

In the above quote Marcuse arrives at what could be a synthesising end. I prefer to stop before the synthesis and to theorise art in community arts as a disruptive and resistant sentiment to take to the process of production and training: to “break the monopoly” of what is. In community arts part of the problem is the creation of “true reality,” often expressed as intent to show the truth about participants and their lives and/or to break stereotypes so that others “can know:” that refugees are ordinary people, or young people don’t deserve to get beaten up by police or not all Muslims are terrorists. Such liberal humanist reactions are defensive moves that not only miss the point, but also keep power hierarchies conceptually intact. They claim to establish new realities (false reconciled understandings), but end up burdening art’s role in social justice. Art in community arts can claim the right and necessity to create its own illusions that disrupt and attack false truths of the real (and the other miserable real of representation), without needing to establish truths: to engage in constant and active rearrangements according to a logic of resistance theorised and conceptualised as part of the process of a project.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 9.

In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno's method of negative dialectic never allows purity. The promise of art amounting to a force for consciousness in the world can always end up in inertia.⁴⁸² And in its struggle to expose, art claims truth but is compelled to lie.⁴⁸³ Semblance, as one of Adorno's methodological concepts is implicated in the fraught and tense condition of autonomy. It is always in danger of betraying the integrity of art: an enemy that sneaks in from art's "other" to pacify art's struggle for autonomy.

In another dialectic manoeuvre, erasure of semblance in autonomous works is also impossible and its presence is part of art's internal struggle. Aesthetic semblance is one of the conditions of art's connection to the social: one of the ways art lives *in*, while expressing the impossibility of its disconnection from the social. Even in artworks that attempt to use pure form and to reject any literal content from the real, semblance still exists in the falseness of aesthetic purity, "...complicitous through the semblance of being purely in-itself, a semblance from which there is no escape even for art that destroys this semblance."⁴⁸⁴ Trying to deny the presence of the social is futile and erasing semblance would erase the very premise of autonomous art.

In its very elements (word, color, tone) art depends on the transmitted cultural material; art shares it with the existing society. And no matter how much art overturns the ordinary meanings of words and images, the transfiguration is still that of a given material. This is the case even when the words are broken, when new ones are invented...This limitation of aesthetic autonomy is the condition under which art can become a social factor.⁴⁸⁵

Semblance is also an ally, a strategy that autonomous art uses to transform oppressive elements of the real, exposing its lies. Rather than being a representation which totalises and makes itself authority, aesthetic semblance occurs as part of the mediated and distanced relationship between art and life: the way elements of the real are at play, mediated by form. Semblance becomes a kind of materialised echo of the real in content, and a possible echo of history, dreams and remembrance as phenomena of the real,⁴⁸⁶ while also existing as literal evidence of art's undeniable and unbreakable attachment to the social world.

⁴⁸² Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 133.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, 132.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 104.

⁴⁸⁵ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 41.

⁴⁸⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 132.

For everything that artworks contain with regard to form and materials, spirit and subject matter, has emigrated from reality into the artworks and in them has divested itself of its reality...⁴⁸⁷

Form mediates the presence of a semblance that exposes false semblance itself. Whatever is taken from the real is no longer of its logic, and becomes inscribed into the aesthetic world of art. In this way autonomous works, in their being-in their own, rather than being for, demonstrate honesty in semblance, and in their production of necessary illusion. "In the context of total semblance, art's semblance of being-in-itself is the mask of truth."⁴⁸⁸ They expose what has been mystified in the real or in previous accounts of the real: especially the dismal mechanics of culture industry products with their pre-packaged, totalised representations of life, which Adorno saw as increasingly engaging in the "liquidation" of art's legitimate semblance.⁴⁸⁹

Truth content beyond the artefact

Every act of making in art is a singular effort to say what the artifact itself is not and what it does not know: precisely this is art's spirit.⁴⁹⁰

Semblance is intrinsically related to what Adorno called truth content. Truth content is not directly discernible or communicated by an artwork, something stated or present. Truth content is beyond the artwork as artefact. It is part of the unknown of any given artefact; the life beyond it, which can never be fully controlled or planned by the artist/s. The negative working of content through form and the manoeuvre with illusion/semblance, create other truth/s (spirit), the existence of which is part of autonomy's longing for itself: that it's truth content socially and historically outlive its existence as artefact. Truth content or the semblance of truth is the "vanishing point" of artefact.

An artwork in community arts does not need to directly show that young person in the corner of a dirty room preparing the needle of his heroin, or a student sitting at a school desk bored out of her mind. Each part of the narrative of injecting heroin can be subjected to a formal transformation that struggles to expose and disrupt the complexity of suffering: the political and

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, 103.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, 227.

⁴⁸⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2005), 91.

⁴⁹⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 131.

historical essence of that injecting moment. Art ceases to represent or depict. Truth content, beyond the artefact as a material reality, resides in that becoming, and "...the rescue of semblance as the semblance of the true."⁴⁹¹ The stunted rhythm of a school bell feels (in sound) like a cash register. Or a shooting needle is shot from behind in an effort to make it look like a mini missile stabbing earth. The discussion in a workshop that could take place about how and why the school bell could resemble a symbol of money, or why a needle should militarily shoot the skin-earth, could be understood as truth content discussion. Political truths can echo out of the artwork (against the tendency to state them explicitly), and the (non abstract) discussion that takes place to create it.

Their truth content cannot be separated from the concept of humanity. Through every mediation, through all negativity, they are images of a transformed humanity and are unable to come to rest in themselves by any abstraction from this transformation.⁴⁹²

The object of art is false entity. Semblance plays a part in constructing its illusion as objectified artefact: "...aesthetically meaningful works feign a unity that cannot be fully achieved so long as society remains antagonistic."⁴⁹³ This works against truth content. Understanding process as a series of truth content possibilities (through discussion, reflection, experiment) steps into this tension between the elements of a work and its falsified illusion as whole, which can also erase its "...participation in processes of production and consumption."⁴⁹⁴ Truth content as process struggles to create political hearts out of the content offered by people and context of a project: to go beyond what appears to be the obvious in "issues" and ideas unfolded during discussion, preliminary sketches or experiments with light/colour. Truth content as process becomes its own force, so that similar to truth content in artefact, "...leaves it behind simply as a husk."⁴⁹⁵

What remains is a semblance that exposes the limits of truth content itself. Art may point to truth content outside itself as artefact, but remains semblance and never universalised truth. "Art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless."⁴⁹⁶ It is the very claim to being universal that corrupts into dominance. This understanding of truth content as never making itself absolute,

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, 154.

⁴⁹² Ibid, 241.

⁴⁹³ Lambert Zuidervaat, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 179.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, 180.

⁴⁹⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 132.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, 132.

helps bring an agitated urgency to process: working between the “illusion” elements of an artwork as they are created, and back into a critique of how they can become humbly (but still militantly), and not violate their own desire for justice. The analytical strength of refusing to universalise, also helps to understand project methodologies as constantly in need of critique and transformation as they are put to work.

...teaching art in a way that encourages future autonomous experience and creation presupposes a heightened sensibility and imagination for restructuring elements of reality rather than affirming the *Is* and art’s positioning in it.⁴⁹⁷

Form as a way to train, the danger of shooting from behind

Shot from behind, the small neck and head of a child moves through the alleyways of the camp and out into a wider space revealing his full body. He is showing us the reality of the refugee camp so that people will know about the lives of Palestinian refugees since their expulsion from Palestine. I wish I could say he was leading us through, making us follow. He is happy to act. To be in a film and against all odds, he does it well. His presence, even while being stalked is the only force that compels.

The camera work makes no effort to undermine the “shot from behind” formula of commodity filmmaking, even though it becomes slightly profile at times, maybe by accident. When asked later, the people who facilitated the workshop said they agreed with the young people to follow him from behind with the camera so as to hide his identity: themselves hiding behind a slogan of “democratising” art and respecting the artistic choices of participants, without offering pedagogically and politically challenging analysis of artistic decisions and without offering the choice to struggle inside art, as a way to struggle with it.

...the *problematization* of the...subjectivist yardstick of preference and “free” selection (as if the realm of art were by definition a marketplace) will contribute to a more general educational autonomy away from the pseudo-individualism that simultaneously effects narcissism and enthrallment to the existent.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ Marianna Papastephanou, “Aesthetics, Education, the Critical Autonomous Self, and the Culture Industry,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40, no. 3 (2006): 79.

⁴⁹⁸ Papastephanou, “Aesthetics, Education,” 79.

The other young people stalking him with the camera were later uncomfortable with the feeling created and with the wide but stunted images that squarely and securely seemed to fix the garbage forever in the corners of the camp. They were uncomfortable with the bursting open sewerage channels and the shot of young men lining the walls, uncritically evoking their “unemployment” watching back at the camera. The zoom-ins and the lack lustre effect of automatic focus, which was meant to show reality, had nothing to do with their own reality of living in a small piece of Palestine in exile.

The camera of an artistic process became the camera of weak journalism, claiming to show, but really distorting. The community artists were European activists, spending their summer in the camp making video with refugee children. They were very good people. The result: a child being stalked and yet another depiction of a refugee camp to add to the store of well intentioned forgettable activist documentaries.

Training and production should generate moments to transgress the limitation of a camera lens and a “passionate” intent to show. Moving back and forth between reality and the potential of image to undo its normalised miseries can activate art as a series of launching points, from which to instigate critical training and production.

Cracking elevations in the changing frequencies of a young male voice that could image point with a trembling almost-stillness that contains nothing, except for the everything of a busy camp street in which particular elements stand out because of a positioning of the camera (and the discussion that has taken place about where to locate it, the ethics of the shot and whether the camera should be obvious to those passing by). Hands moving so fast they blur with swathes of washing hung in the colours of Palestine,⁴⁹⁹ but not fast enough to catch up with stretches of spilling-over silence because “...what else can be said that hasn’t been said, or even thought?”⁵⁰⁰

Being embedded in society and culture, dialectically dependent on reality as its other, art is subject to historicity.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ A popular resistance act in the West Bank and Gaza for which many women were imprisoned, before the Oslo Accords drained the resistance from Palestinian imagery. Such an evocation speaks historically and across the exile divide and reflects a concern among activists that the diaspora is not only physically separated by force, but bureaucratically and discursively too: by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) and the methods and discourses of NGOs and researchers.

⁵⁰⁰ A response to people engaging in “useless” geopolitical talk that seems to belong to another era.

⁵⁰¹ Papastephanou, “Aesthetics, Education,” 78.

How does this younger generation survive in this camp? Could it reverberate with the way a camera and a microphone should struggle to survive in an environment that politically and socially exposes their limits to represent? What are the contradictions of being a younger generation of modern history's most permanent refugees within the geopolitical disaster that everyday destroys your life a little more? How can people ever understand the way you love and hate the camp (and your life) at the same time with equal intensity? They probably never can and trying to make them "understand" could be a waste of time, even if we assume they (a few) will care for longer than the duration of our film.

Making sense of contradictions expressed in any workshop at any time, should not be exposed to the burden of reception as "understanding," even with people accustomed to thinking about re/presenting to the world outside. Step back inside the interior of the time, place and people of a project and maybe we can consider how to make a "new" sense of it to ourselves, lest we be hijacked by the common sense of modern representation and the logic of the technology and its established techniques that dominate a justified desperation to show the world. Forget the world so that we can try to become our own resistant world: of sense and poetics.

Fast cuts and close shots to create pace that can embody the spirit of the many intense and engaged conversations that happen in that camp: formal techniques trying to mediate the empirical, not to describe it or to report on, but to transform discursive "capabilities" of camp residents into a force that could maybe even threaten to vibrate into the destruction of image (and the discussion about primacy of the visual in western culture and the role it has played in normalising Palestinian suffering). Form then mediates content into another direction, stretching or slowing down in sound, not satisfied to let the empirical reign as a possible appearance of a simplified or reconciled revolution: teaching sound effects becomes part of the internal struggle of art to do justice to real suffering while moving beyond it.

Art draws away from this reality, because it cannot represent this suffering without subjecting it to aesthetic form, and thereby to the mitigating catharsis, to enjoyment. Art is inexorably infested with this guilt.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰² Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 55.

The zoom-in on unemployed youth could have been reserved for the presence of multinational pollution like pepsi cans and Turkish and Saudi Arabian chocolate bar wrappers. Or the zoom-in as a dictatorial automatic and commodified function could have been challenged, and a different way of moving closer discussed. Pace, direction, what do we take with us as we move in? "Form is the transformation of what is given into something *other*...unreal, nonidentical, outside the grasp of concepts, categories, or distinctions..."⁵⁰³

Why do we need to move in? Would a close up without the moving in say what we want? What is it we want to say with the camera at this point? Are we just saying "look at the garbage: we have no services?" Or do we have other ideas about garbage: where it comes from (discussion about market waste and the culture of disposability) and the role it plays in a wider world of oppressive forces which keeps us here in this camp and in this situation? "The artwork is not only the echo of suffering, it diminishes it; form, the organon of its seriousness, is at the same time the organon of the neutralization of suffering."⁵⁰⁴

And what are the possibilities of close up? When you look at something really close, how does it transform? What and how is a close up that "...memorializes at the same time...transforms sorrow into art."⁵⁰⁵ Transforms into an image concept that disrupts what has been normalised in a standard wide shot of garbage in a camp or ghetto: working against the corruption of semblance which distorts while claiming to represent.

Internal struggles, form and content

Adorno and Marcuse centralised form as the way art creates its difference to the real: its anti capitalist aesthetics. In the density and detail of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno offers distinctions between the two, with aesthetics as an overriding force of art and form its weapon against art becoming commercial, socially useful or mirror of the empirical. Form is not about technical bravado. Form is not the technical. In the *Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse writes that form can be stylised, but it is also not style. In his various culture industry writings, Adorno (and Horkheimer) vigorously critiques style and the technical as capitalist tactics of domination.

⁵⁰³ Gerald. L. Bruns, "On the Conundrum of Form and Material in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, no.2 (2008): 225.

⁵⁰⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 39.

⁵⁰⁵ Aldon Lynn Nielsen, "Fugitive Fictions," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 329.

“To hit upon the idea that form has been overestimated in art, one must fail to recognize that form is essential to art, that it mediates content...”⁵⁰⁶ The attachment of art to the social world through the role that content plays in form redeems Adorno’s theorising from accusations of form as elitism. Artworks that aim to be “pure form” engage in a false semblance of absolutism, and deny their attachment to the social: “...formalism as an empty game...”⁵⁰⁷ As it mediates content, form also serves to expose the art work to analysis, to make it vulnerable and to make visible its production, working against the reifying of art under capitalism.⁵⁰⁸ Material content taken from the social, subjectively crafted in each element is semblance as “...literal, illusionless ruins of empirical reality...”⁵⁰⁹ expressing honesty about art’s own struggle to be anti empirical.

When I teach and train what form is, I begin with the idea that form is *how* we tell the story or *how* we create the work. Content is what we are saying, popularly known as the “story” or the “plot.” Any story can be told in thousands of different ways according to possibilities available and those we create. It is form that holds power. Form is how we say what we want to say: from here form can be understood as struggling to become the story itself. “Because form is the central concept of aesthetics and is always presupposed by it in the givenness of art, aesthetics must gather all its forces to think the concept through.”⁵¹⁰

Imagination breathes through form. It is form that can take us into freer ways of making art away from the standard and the normal, to stop describing, or expressing something that has already come or taken place. Form helps create art which is new in itself and new in what it offers to the outside of itself: a way to move towards what we wish for the world or for own lives. And if we don’t wish for anything, we should have signed up for the anger management workshop instead. Form is our weapon, or a range of weapons: concept opportunities to use against the real. Form creates possibility to make our thoughts and discussions with each other “truer” in art: closer to the intensity of their happening. It is a way our works can become of our own time, place and context: our own, while also being of someone else’s Here. The street seller’s melodious cry that we want to record, the splash of dirty dusty orange on the window pane as location just before sunset, or the story-image your grandmother tells of her father’s figure at the window defending their home against the zionists with a handmade gun of the 1930s revolt.

⁵⁰⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 142.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 307.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, 143.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, 155.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, 141.

The decision to turn on the microphone or the camera to “capture” them denies the reality, the memory or the history. As soon as we have turned these on we have already changed that story or moment. There is no real inside the lens or the microphone, there is only what we want to create. “A photograph doesn't show the flies nor the thick white smell of death.”⁵¹¹ A consciousness of what happens to our content is necessary if we are to control our artworks and the aesthetic terms on which they move out into the world. The way we work this content of memory, story fragment or colour with form is what makes our art specific to us, while also speaking to a splash of dirty dusty colour somewhere else.

The moment of true volition...is mediated through...the form of the work itself, whose crystallization becomes an analogy of that other condition which should be. As eminently constructed and produced objects, works of art, even literary ones, point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life.⁵¹²

For Amiri Baraka experiment with form is “zoom:” the sensibility to resist oppression. His artwork was a location for aesthetic struggle as revolutionary breathing: “...complexity, invention, confessional recklessness, and abiding contribution to complicating the African presence in American letters.”⁵¹³ Standardisation and homogeneity are traps that lay in wait for the black (or oppositional) artist and result in sanctioned retelling of lives. Baraka’s poetry and prose avoid pacification of black lives as essentialised expressions of blackness: “...the poet remarks that ‘New Black Music is this: Find the self, then kill it.’”⁵¹⁴ Expressions of blackness or resistant black subjectivity move like a skilled guerrilla fighter: stealth, flexibility, constant transformation, with a focus firmly on the source of power, while in experimental dialogue with others.

Sometimes contradictions appear where Baraka seems to privilege content over form. In “Afro-American Literature and Class Struggle,” he locates content as “*principle*” which “...tells us about the need for unity, struggle, victory.”⁵¹⁵ Even though the discussion is quite orthodox,⁵¹⁶ very

⁵¹¹ Jean Genet, “Four Hours in Shatila,” trans. Daniel R. Dupecher and Martha Perrigaud, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12, no. 3 (1983): 5.

⁵¹² Theodor W. Adorno, “Commitment,” trans. Francis McDonagh, *New Left Review* 1, no. 87-88 (1974): 89.

⁵¹³ Greg Tate, “Vicious Modernism,” foreword to *The Fiction of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2000), xviii.

⁵¹⁴ Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967), 176, quoted in Nielsen, “Fugitive Fictions,” 325.

⁵¹⁵ Amiri Baraka, “Afro-American Literature and Class Struggle,” in *Daggers and Javelins: Essays 1974-1979* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1984), 329.

⁵¹⁶ And simplistically dismissive of the work (content) of other black writers as acquiescent: his aesthetic discussion of Michelle Wallace and Ntozake Shange’s work is also imprisoned within orthodox class definitions of female struggle.

much taking from Marxist social realism, Baraka does not deny the importance of form, but writes against empty bourgeois experimentations for form's sake: "The endless acrobatic 'avant-gardists' many times...have *nothing* to say. Except that they have nothing to say."⁵¹⁷ This also meets with Adorno's arguments about pure form. During a 1998 presentation to a New Orleans workshop, Baraka describes the play between content and form as aesthetic strategy.

Form is important but I think content is more important...but at the same time, how you say it is important...has to be a vehicle for your content...It's not form our critics be objecting to, finally though, it's the content, it's the politics.⁵¹⁸

Baraka seems to privilege content, only to recentralise form as the way art becomes resistant and dangerous to the status quo. There is something geopolitical in the way Baraka unfolds form and content: a series of manoeuvres across the political and artistic helps to agitate against any idea of form as elitist. Form on its own cannot be revolutionary. Without content that centralises black lives, form becomes empty or lost, at risk of cooption. And content without experiment with form, lapses into sanctioned description: both the social (Black Nationalist/Marxist) and the experimental (avant-garde) need to shed definitions and prescriptions.

Baraka: What became clear to me is that, if you adopt a certain form, that form is going to push you into certain content because the form is not just the form, the form itself is content. There is content in form and in your choice of form.⁵¹⁹

Salaam: ...Form and content are basically a Western dualism, and as far as the African and African-American traditions go, you have form and content, but you also have style...

...Baraka: No. But you have to have correct form, or your shit is going to be fucked up. It's like if I put you in a cop suit; I don't care what you think, some-body might say...There's a cop, shoot him. There's a content to form.

⁵¹⁷ Baraka, "Afro-American Literature," 329.

⁵¹⁸ Kalamu ya Salaam, "A Conversation with Amiri Baraka: 1998," *Modern American Poetry: Department of English, University of Illinois*, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/baraka/salaam.htm (accessed August 1, 2016).

⁵¹⁹ Kalamu ya Salaam, "Amiri Baraka Analyzes How He Writes," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 211.

Salaam: So you're saying that each form - particularly once it has been codified into a specific form - proposes its own content.

Baraka: ...because it carries thought...There's a reason for that form; it coheres with somebody's language, somebody's rhythm, somebody's life...It carries the content by putting a philosophical emphasis on certain aspects of life.⁵²⁰

Local content

Read in the context of Baraka's repertoire, the above conversation reflects struggle to give speaking life to aesthetic revolutionary play: to make forms "...a form of content."⁵²¹ Its political urgency lies in centralising realities that art is in solidarity with: to make historical, or transform sorrow into art. Even at the risk of failure, art should struggle to be relevant and speak with (and to) the people it wants to be in struggle with. Or at least make itself impossible to ignore.

Like an Owl exploding
In your life in your brain in your self
Like an Owl who know the devil
All night, all day if you listen, Like an Owl
Exploding in fire. We hear the questions rise
In terrible flame like the whistle of a crazy dog⁵²²

Until recently, Baraka's aesthetics have been relatively ignored by academia.⁵²³ But their legacy is hugely important for black artists who came after:⁵²⁴ "...a singular and uncanny idea of African American ethnicity that could only be adequately expressed outside of the sociological and cultural-anthropological constructions of origin and identity."⁵²⁵ For other "first world" artists of colour interested in experimentation beyond the "identity" art that official multiculturalisms encourage, Baraka's work, like that of The Black Audio Film Collective (UK), also displaces a

⁵²⁰ Ibid, 224.

⁵²¹ Salaam, "A Conversation with Amiri Baraka."

⁵²² Amiri Baraka, "Somebody Blew Up America," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 203.

⁵²³ Patrick Roney, "The Paradox of Experience: Black Art and Black Idiom in the Work of Amiri Baraka." *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 407.

⁵²⁴ James Smethurst, "'Pat Your Foot and Turn the Corner': Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement, and the Poetics of a Popular Avant-Garde," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003), 269.

⁵²⁵ Roney, "The Paradox," 408.

“...binary logic...which continues to entrap...in a traditional and all-too-Western ethics of Self-creation through Self-representation.”⁵²⁶ For artists often unable to access art in native tongues and contexts that slavery, exile or immigration sever, Baraka’s work expresses the inalienability that lives, stories and ideas of non dominant peoples deserve critically unique forms.

Dante’s Hell magnificently illuminates the consciousness of America’s ghettos...all the deep thinking about Being and Nothingness hidden beneath the surface. The book demands to be read as a flow of verbal energy...rather than as a linear narrative.⁵²⁷

Baraka’s brilliantly angry consciousness asserts the right to freedom from formulas and truths manufactured by white capitalist culture: what Langston Hughes referred to as “standardization” in his 1926 legendary essay “The Artist and the Racial Mountain,” twenty years before Horkheimer and Adorno’s dissection of the culture industry, with its glaring absence of the role racial supremacy plays in its homogenising. Baraka also emphasised production away from the gaze of the art world and its various orientalisms, and indeed separate from the sociologist or the psychologist. “Baraka’s fiction vitally demands that the ferocity of black rage and the fragility of the black individual’s neuroses be given equal sympathy.”⁵²⁸

More experimental approaches are called for to do justice to the lives of black people and to undo real and representational violence of past and present. This does not mean that experiment with form is popular irrelevance or disconnect. Form is central, but careful consideration of content brings another dimension and avoids a getting “off into ‘art’.”⁵²⁹ Not through making art simple or didactic (patronising), but through art as specific and relevant to the content of black lives as it experiments in its revolutionary breathing: to find forms and languages that create complex new sensings while remaining local. Writing out of the continuing brutal legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Baraka’s works have been described as popular avant-garde⁵³⁰ or avant-garde of black liberation,⁵³¹ expressing a necessity to find forms that reject the “master’s tools,” while taking care to be of and for the people: a kind of popular anti popular.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 408.

⁵²⁷ Tate, “Vicious,” xiv.

⁵²⁸ Ibid, x.

⁵²⁹ Amiri Baraka, “Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance,” in *Daggers and Javelins: Essays 1974-1979* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1984), 156.

⁵³⁰ Smethurst, “Pat Your Foot,” 265.

⁵³¹ Won-gu Kim, “In the Tradition,” 346.

Never before could one find such a large, relatively cohesive, and heavily theorized American avant-garde which so emphatically linked its radical formal and ideological practices to popular culture...⁵³²

Baraka's popular avant-garde in its expression through form, does not reference or transplant elements from life in a didactic or overtly social realist manner. These become forces within the logic world of the art and part of its production logic, so that local knowledge and content affect art. While maintaining autonomy in form, art also submits and allows itself to be affected by the detail of the real it claims to be in solidarity with: "...the black revolutionary spirit and action of the people will provoke the poetry to action, will give art its direct revolutionary force."⁵³³

Putting aside reception in community arts is a way to undo the reification of art/object: art must become humble, flexible, affected by conditions and particularities of its making and the people who make it. Art becomes the "leftover" of a project's experiment with thought and imagination, guided by its context. The idea of local knowledge/content is not new in community arts and is indeed part of its development language. I want to refresh this commitment through experiment with form, which cannot be plucked from "high art" or European "avant-garde." As discussed in section four, when formal concerns are included in projects, reference and method often comes from western bourgeois art. In my teaching life I use film or literature from anti capitalist European movements. I use them as instances, rather than legacy or formal methods to be adhered to. They become other examples of resistant art.

The Harlem Renaissance wanted to show a whole reality, naked and stewing. It wanted to be governed by its own reality.⁵³⁴

A fierce adherence to art that produces its own aesthetic world out of the local can be reflected in process. Our/their time and place is the whole world. We produce and create from our/their suffering, loves, intensities, memories, wounds, an isolated frequency of a busker on the corner, the melody of a fruit seller who passes every day, accents, ledges, eyelashes, a buzz of languages outside a train station, or the play of light and shadow at a particular time in that particular

⁵³² Smethurst, "'Pat Your Foot,'" 267.

⁵³³ Sherry Brennan, "On the Sound of Water: Amiri Baraka's 'Black Art'." *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 308.

⁵³⁴ Baraka, "Langston Hughes," 158.

alleyway across from the clinic, the centre, the camp or on a prison wall (if a play of light is still possible in the fortresses of the prison industrial complex or inside prison-like checkpoints), "...is where we coming from, our story, our tail just like that snake crawling into its own mouth."⁵³⁵

The alleyway or prison wall is not background to a didactic story, but can become aesthetic happening: presence created in the absence of a human being in the shot/image. Decisions about form can be facilitated so that for example, they move from discussions about life incarcerated, or life crossing a steel fortress checkpoint, and infuse into the art as politicised aesthetic concept. Lines in the wall transform into cuts in skin, cracks into lines of escape, bars distort by whips of sun or muffled sounds heard from the inside intensify into a breathe that seems to cut through steel or explode the daily scrape of a food trolley that sounds like ticker tape of a stock market.

Life and local knowledge cease to be descriptively presented, but affect the work conceptually. Process and its context become sedimented layers within the aesthetics of the work. If there is no way to make those lines transform into cuts (because of equipment or because the idea is impossible), the process of its imagining has already taken place. Art as a process of political conceptualising comes before its final existence as object. Baraka's critique of the object as leftover or Adorno's illusion of the artefact as whole, become expressed in the intent to give up the object (even while working to produce it) for a revolutionary imagining.

"There's stuff in your life that's incredible. All kinds of things. I don't know what they are, you don't know what they are, but you can find out."⁵³⁶ The person who suggested that location of shadow/light play may observe it every day. She may not have imagined exactly how and where it could live in an artwork. But Baraka's "...collective fire of actual life committed..."⁵³⁷ can lead to "...process...as a catching fire between extremes..."⁵³⁸ and local aesthetic observations become intellectualised and politically conceptual. This is the kind of process Baraka refers to in "Hunting is Not Those Heads on the Wall," where he argues against the "leftover" status of the object that mystifies and makes invisible process as thought. A consciousness of oppositional

⁵³⁵ Amiri Baraka, "The 'Blues Aesthetic' and the 'Black Aesthetic': Aesthetics as the Continuing Political History of a Culture," *Black Music Journal* 11, no.2 (1991): 108.

⁵³⁶ Salaam, "A Conversation with Amiri Baraka."

⁵³⁷ Baraka, "Afro-American Literature," 317.

⁵³⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven," in *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (London: University of California Press, 2002), 567.

thought in production with form is a powerful sensibility to struggle for in community arts, and that particular play of light or shadow can release possibilities for radical art making right under the nose of the development world or the high class art gallery around the corner.

Content is called upon to join the battle, and everyday lives become part of political aesthetic struggle, rather than existing to be showcased or to educate across “difference.” The work contains the familiar, but a careful conceptual process of mediating its transformation from the “real to reel,” is the line along which a project carries itself: disrupting trajectories of suffering through the way form can create political hearts and new sensings as aesthetic happening. A project may generate conceptual and analytical discussion, but didactic artistic methodologies that do not politically experiment with form are limited in the ways they can generate resistant aesthetic happenings. Form also helps to avoid reproducing the dominance of culture industry products: gimmicky effects, standardised shots, angles and colour systems, which need to be resisted in order to make space for experiment. So that content offered from the lives of people involved does not get abused again in representation: slotted into regimes of power, dominated by the methods of charity or commercial culture as “...terrorized reason and sanity.”⁵³⁹

Form as a way to train, agitation of sound and shadow

And then on another night, on the roof of a building in the same camp years later, trainers and participants are working through shot by shot. Each holds an image of a shadow in action: drinking water, ploughing the land, painting and preparing for battle. Images stretch across a wall and floor divided by a water pipe. In each shot there is a real material object that also moves, so as not to fall into empirical attempts to literally make Palestinians into “...a people of dream, of shadows rather than flesh and blood...”⁵⁴⁰ or the shadows of corpses. A book and its pages, a red curtain, a radio hanging into the frame: “to be free and independent of Zionist sleeps and awakenings...the distance between the people of dreams and the real fedayeen was proof that a new element had come into the world.”⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹ Baraka, “Somebody Blew Up America,” 198.

⁵⁴⁰ Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Picador, 1989), 279. Genet recalls philosophical and political narratives of acquaintance, Monsieur Mustapha.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 279.

The narrative, its conceptual groundings and a list of shots were developed out of the collective thinking labour of three previous workshops: definite and planned, but still open to change at the time of shooting. Each shot takes at least an hour to shoot, even though they were previously conceptualised. The light, the movement and the structuring and image design of shadow, and how it is created out of the material object, has to be negotiated and tested before final takes can be shot. Everybody is doing everything at different times: in shot two those who worked the camera are designing the set, while still offering comments for camera work. In the final shot, shadow, with a gun across his shoulder, walks along the wall before disappearing. The camera meets an open space where trees and lights are discernible in the close distance.⁵⁴²

During the next few days while the image is being edited (planned, but modified in action) the sound team begins work. Sound is different to image, less material, less familiar and less able to be imagined because it can go to places in postproduction very far from its original recording. Sound is also easily taken hostage by image and its dominance in popular culture so that it ends up decorating or literally depicting the visual: footsteps, spoken voice and stupidly dramatic and didactic music. The trainers spoke openly against conventional usage of sound and asked people to imagine sound as another opportunity for expression, separate from image in its narrative and trajectory. Music was also discouraged, as a way to make space to think with sound.

But suggested by one of the (local Palestinian) trainers, a revolutionary song of the 1930s is chosen. It was recorded in one of the refugee camps in Jordan after 1948 and circulates as part of the cultural and political creation of Palestinian legacies. Sung acapella by a woman in Palestinian Bedouin Arabic: she sings to a young revolutionary, warning him about his headstrong intent to go to war against two armies and the global forces working against him. Mixed in is a love story, but unprotected from the escalating theft of people's land, homes and lives by Zionist militias and the British colonial army supporting them.

Imagining and planning sound is more limited than image, because its possible manifestation (in a thousand different directions) is more abstract, difficult to know until listening, experimented with and listening again. Rather than showcased across the soundtrack, the song is broken up and used in bits, layered over and throughout a stretched canvas of subtle but intensely present

⁵⁴² StudioCamps, *حَيِّدْ Keep Out!*, Short Film, 1:48, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWPCHnTyM3k> (accessed July 25, 2016).

atmosphere previously recorded at three in the morning by one of the young people from the roof of the building that she lives in. The atmosphere of the camp is also brought up and down throughout the film: it refuses to remain in the background and at times rises to join the action: "To make the sound become something more than sound, but reality and action."⁵⁴³

Sections of the song are chosen, not for lyrical meaning (content), but according to the rhythm and grain of the voice: "...revolutionary by virtue of the form given to the content."⁵⁴⁴ We try different pieces with each action. As we work we realise we are using the marginalised voice of a Bedouin woman to work against the shadow of shadow, so that small stretches of voice urge the curtain to movement and bring leaves falling down over the movement of wrapping the face and head in the fedayee way ready for battle. Her voice-character instigates action: agitating the presence of real objects in the image to deny false semblance, so that shadows can never be mistaken as mere reflections of a human being, but independent entities that choose shadow as welcome strategy for battle. She discourages shadow and battle even while urging them along, making both more complex and critical in their engagement with history, memory and wind that escalates briefly in volume and reverberation, but quickly chooses to disappear.

Internal struggles, the particular as collective happening

The necessary illusion struggle of autonomous art lies not only between the real and the aesthetic, but also between different elements of a work of art. Autonomy is not a totalising character of art works. It lives in particular aspects and moments. Within his condemnation of the culture industry, Adorno often pointed to instances of potential autonomy in products, defeated by the totalising formulas of numbing repetition, juxtaposition, humanist mosaic, pacifying bites of audio and standardised segments.

Adorno maintained a negative dialectical methodology to theorise the way particular elements in autonomous works of art must struggle against conformity imposed by the idea of a totalising whole. The particular must become its own happening of autonomy. "It gives up the ordered realm of perception and apperception and as a magnifying glass focuses on the particular in ever

⁵⁴³ Joseph Heithaus, "Hunting is Not Those Heads:" The Jones/Baraka Critic as Taxidermist," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 367.

⁵⁴⁴ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, xii.

fresh ways.”⁵⁴⁵ At the same time the particular plays a role in the unfolding of artworks, but the whole should not dominate or suppress. Adorno’s most common reference was to musical composition and his analysis focused on different sections to expose particular autonomous happenings. “Artistic truth redeems the neglected, suppressed, and coerced elements that are put down by totality.”⁵⁴⁶

The tension between the particular and whole in art works is social struggle: it aesthetically takes from, and speaks to the tension between the individual and the collective. Autonomous happenings of the particular in artworks, can be theorised as the sediment of subjectivities struggling against social/communal dominance and demand for conformity. This is another way that art becomes its own type of praxis. Products of the culture industry are not to be condemned for artistic shallowness, but because they violently manufacture the fascism of real life through homogenising tactics. They promise a false collectivism, coercing the particular (individual) into identifying with the whole, erasing difference and stunting the development of resistant subjectivities. “For absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole.”⁵⁴⁷

The ability of art to expose or disrupt the detail of suffering through its particular struggles for freedom remains illusion. It remains art. Reconciliation across the border from art’s struggle into the social produces the falseness of a totalising move. There can be no harmony as long as real injustice remains. Possibility and impossibility are at the same time perpetual and antagonistic forces in autonomous art. Particularities as autonomous happenings work against a collapse into reconciled representation that could mystify or mask art’s illusion quality. The actual internal disunity reveals “...true unity as a possibility rather than as something actually achieved. As an illusory revelation and a revelatory illusion...”⁵⁴⁸

The kind of autonomy that informs this research does not cancel collectivism and I have preferred to look for ways that autonomy can manifest with and through collective production of art/objects, while making space for individual subjectivities to struggle against. This research imagines an autonomous collectivism which does not extinguish people’s ability to take their

⁵⁴⁵ Papastephanou, “Aesthetics, Education,” 78.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid, 78.

⁵⁴⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 1.

⁵⁴⁸ Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic*, 179.

own trajectories in learning and production, and to being something of their own even if it clashes with that of someone else's. This is reflective of, while being in play with the understanding of the particularities of an artwork, imagined as elements to be produced that struggle to be original, subjective and embodying the whole world: instances or moments within the trajectory of the art making, at which different peoples can step into and engage with.

The understanding of the particular and the whole provides a conceptual tension to resist the urge to work for unity or a simplified idea of the collective. The production of the artwork can be understood as a series of moments, each of which carries production, pedagogy and oppositional politics, struggling to become autonomous collective happenings. The artwork is brought to existence through agitation between the collective and communal context of making art (whole) and the more individual and specific desires, thoughts and training needs of the people taking part in a process (particular). The elements of an artwork not only struggle to become their own happenings, each demands to be produced and trained, and can invite and speak to the difference among those involved, rather than collapsing into community. A conscious understanding of each particular as a new possibility, can unfold different locations for people to assert their own subjectivity onto the life of the process and the artwork to be made.

I am also trying to incorporate a conscious understanding of the particular as autonomous happening (in object and process) to consider the collective or communal without locating them in literal and didactic definitions of dialogical and relational activities that often reflect corporate and state methodologies. Art/object making is always relational, especially in a collective context. Any process has to step outside of its circle to bring the object into existence: whether it be to speak to the local council for a permit to shoot, or to speak to Hajj on the corner to access an electricity source or to ask the artist who lives down the road or someone's cousin to contribute an image for a mural/ installation or to research the movement of light in a location.

Acts of process must be worked for as autonomous happenings. This is not dependent on their definition as art. They keep their own particularity, their own point of strength and feel no need to collapse into the simplified arms of "social" aesthetic. It's not that their potential specialness is denied, but rather that specialness has to be struggled for in such activities (consultations, meetings, conversations), which are standard state, corporate and military tactics. As acts of form they mimic the forms of the real, and like the content taken from the real in autonomous

art, must be actively made to defect from the hold of reason. Their specialness doesn't lie in the announcement of themselves as art to fulfil a simplified notion of social or collective aesthetic, but rather in their unfolding as disruptive of the oppressive logic they have been taken from.

They also struggle to become "special" because they need to be in order to join the wider struggle of the artwork to be produced, and not because on their own they are aesthetic antidotes to capitalism. A discussion in a project can become towards justice in its vigorous and critical collective, while respectful of subjectivity in its listening and speaking. Autonomous happenings do not build themselves on the oppression of others, inside or outside the group. They step carefully and thoughtfully, always analytical and critical of self and power, as they speak to the outside of self and against the outside of the real. In the practice I am theorising, autonomy also lies in the need for autonomous happenings to rise to the overall logic of a project which seeks to transform the real and its suffering. The particular struggles for itself as a moment of justice, and as part of a wider revolutionary struggle.

Postscript: aloneness (the particular) and solidarity (the whole), Beirut, July 2006

Under the trees, everything, everyone was aquiver, laughing, filled with wonder at this life, so new for all, and in these vibrations there was something strangely immovable, watchful, reserved, protected like someone praying. Everything belonged to everyone. Everyone was alone in himself.⁵⁴⁹

Then one late night I was violently grabbed out of sleep by my solar plexus smashing itself against the wall of my stomach. It was a massive hit and everyone must have thought it was here in the neighbourhood. After an unidentifiable stretch of time, maybe two seconds maybe a thousand, you understand that it's not. Here. Then wounding sadness and shame at your relief that it destroyed someone else's Here. Cigarette tips across neighbourhood balconies flickered similar crises.

After sleep fled, I took the recorder out. In the middle of August in Beirut hot and still, hours of frantic air choking through the microphone. I was frustrated I couldn't catch the real and whole sound of siege by air. The digital recorder and microphone transpired; real was too high in the sky to be caught. Remaining on the minidisc is something like a based-out background whistle of an ice fiend promised infinite supply.

⁵⁴⁹ Genet, "Four Hours in Shatila," 3.

Here became very important during those days. People made their own songs to whistle back to each other through accidentally left open windows: even if you didn't know them, even if they were in another village. Here was most important for the peoples of the south. Remaining. Free of military occupation. And for the rest of us, some like me who had another passport to take them out, Here became another sentiment, becoming in the place and presence of its time.

Up until the first day of the war the pages of my diary were packed full of tasks. For 33 days they were empty. From one day (peace) to the next (war) the whole rhythm of personal life changed. My memory remembered to rely on itself. Tasks urged themselves into completion. I was one, of a group, organised as part of many into civil resistance, completing interviews and radio feature stories to send out to independent media, raising funds, buying mattresses, hunting down black market medicine, recruited by kids into playing and collectively sorting vegetables for salad inside a classroom of the displaced.

Or sitting in fucked up silence after an aerial massacre: depression too strong to break through, made worse by being in community.

The first few days I moved around, still not quite sure what war means and how one must live through it. Eventually the body's rattle out in the rumble of heavy bombardment and techno-fanatic hegemony packs you inside or makes you flee. Internal rhythms change. Sound reverberates differently and you discover how bones promote to red alert even the closing of a fridge, now a cupboard.⁵⁵⁰

Then the need to assert some type of subjectivity against a thing which possesses none pushed me out into public, but with a careful and shifted way of being. Tunnels, bridges are to be avoided. Being back before night is advisable. Don't go to the areas onto which bombardment is focused. Talk less, listen more. Never forget there are imposters posing as you on the monitors of drones, warplanes, tanks and warships.

That's why when the resistance brings them down, or damages back to base, the joy you feel is intensely intimate, made wonderful by being in community.

⁵⁵⁰ Son of a Truck Driver, *Smell of the Fucking Fridge*, (unpublished prose, Beirut, July 2006).

Some practice features of autonomous art as praxis

If the subversion of experience proper to art and the rebellion against the established reality principle contained in this subversion cannot be translated into political praxis, and if the radical potential of art lies precisely in this non-identity, then the question arises: how can this potential find valid representation in a work of art and how can it become a factor in...transformation...⁵⁵¹

The writings below do experimental work. They are an attempt to crawl inside the life of a project and to theorise praxis out into autonomous and militant art making in community arts: something like a form for the practice. They are a selection of practice/s, to which other workers in the field would have their own approach across different types of art making. They call on quotes from other trainers/artists: people I have worked with or read about in the literature and whose ideas I feel meet with mine in some way.

They are not all new and artists/trainers will recognise their own methodologies. What I am trying to do is to refresh them within the current theoretical framework. At times they feel arbitrary, not comprehensive enough and other times prescriptive and “unrealistic.” There are problems and too many questions evoked. Some of them will continue to be unfolded and practised into the theoretical work of this dissertation.

The writings express a series of strategies that attempt to take principles of autonomous and militant art into process: to materialise them into praxis in the way that Baraka theorised art as a material force pushing out of its own realm. Art accepts to be of and for the people and rejects its special status, surrendering itself to be an object crafted, learnt, taught and not always identifiable as “modern art:” or so low tech it becomes buried in the ground, or too slow, incomplete, not on show, without an audience, but holds on to what makes it anti reason, anti common sense, anti explanatory and anti didactic. Methods of praxis, accept to be bent and cracked and to escape from the dictates of the real through a systematic approach of becoming aware of and undoing established practice in its detail.

⁵⁵¹ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 39.

Time

To spend the whole day on one shot if need be. Bureaucratic time deserves to be disrupted if it can't move with the rhythm of the group...

To explore how one shot can be agitated down into a multitude of possibilities and political aesthetic decisions...

To forget about a conclusion and to start with the difficult, tentatively and supportively...

Shy of falling, a drop hangs heavily from a ceiling in the Gaza Hospital Building, Sabra, Beirut. *I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about "achievements," diseases cured, improved standards of living.* It is finally falling on the whiteness of the page, spreading as a puddle into the blackness of words floating in a free flow.⁵⁵²

To break the rule of beginner/intermediate/advanced and the way it makes assumptions and decisions before a project begins. To challenge scarring of capacity, so that decisions about what needs to be learnt are related to the particularity of any given moment. Software is unfolded according to the aesthetic program, and training of preliminary skills guided by this focus...

Artistic production begins at the beginning...

...it carries emotional weight...certain sounds and certain themes and lyrics. A group of young people might be encouraged to sit around with pieces of paper, scribbling down ideas. But even at that point, they're treating scraps of paper in a way that might be manipulated as data within the computer as well.⁵⁵³

Time scars production and borders into the pre, present and post. Community arts can smuggle itself across so that production decisions are part of preproduction imaginings. Sculpting, scripting, decision making and imagining before the camera is turned on, is part of the intellectual and political process of turning it on...

⁵⁵² Son of a Truck Driver, second introduction to Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Arabic edition), trans. Abdul Jabbar Khamsi (Beirut: Dar el Farabi, 2013), 1. Quote taken from original English transcript.

⁵⁵³ Gary Stewart, "Digital Diaspora: Young People, Technology and Contested Space," in *Community, Culture and Globalization*, eds. Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 2002), 163.

By altering camera and set angles, scale, perspective and lighting, we can integrate the various elements in camera before the shot is taken.⁵⁵⁴

Random forays can easily produce booty video clip shots and pouting facebook friendlies. The real world is not passively waiting for our entry with camera or (phallic) microphone. It is ready to control. The real world must be considered an enemy that will distort the very heart of artistic intention. Real world contains Canon or Panasonic and Sony and Adobe who must not be allowed to accidentally dominate intentions...

The aim of the education always betrays a particular bent toward these technological fields, which is essentially a set of techno-industries, rather than being more accountable toward, say, a history of production within the field, or the interpretation and reformulation of ideas and practices that result from the play between technological content and artistic form.⁵⁵⁵

To produce as we pre-produce can challenge the world and representation. Imagine and script shot by shot in as much detail as possible, while remaining flexible and sensitive to ideas and happenings that may mediate or change during a shoot. Edit and compile with imagination...

Community

To make timing work to the rhythm of participants and the rest of us must adjust. But being on time is not about following bureaucratic rules. It is to live as if you are on the front line of a life and death situation where your choices reverberate onto the life of another, even if at times life takes over and being on time is impossible...

Listening to each other and focus is because the enemy is around the corner, not because the process is trying to civilise anyone or create "moral equivalence." Listening also helps create questions that can conceptualise...

⁵⁵⁴ Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, "In the Corporate Shadows: Community Arts Practice and Technology," *Leonardo* 26, no.5 (1993): 453.

⁵⁵⁵ Paul Chan, "The Unbearable Lightness of New Media Education: Notes on Teaching, Technology, and Art" (presentation at the International Symposium on Electronic Art, Paris, December 7-10, 2000), http://isea-archives.org/docs/2000/proceedings/ISEA2000_proceedings.pdf (accessed August 1, 2016).

To question getting to know you games and “I am” ice breakers. Often the trainer/s is the only one who doesn’t know anyone and games and “AA sessions”⁵⁵⁶ can serve to centre and privilege their needs. Find other beginnings that relate to the aesthetic program. Centralise the art/praxis of making revolution: make it the action around which we get to know each other. To become aesthetic comrades rather than NGO manufactured buddies...

To make space for people in the group to teach and learn from others as ideas are discussed and images and sounds imagined or experimented with. Even while there will always be tasks that the trainer/coordinator must do, they need to actively look for times to step back, times when they do not know. To work from knowledge and its limits...

Labour and control

To make sure those preparing food for the workshop are brought into the conceptualising of the artwork and take part in the workshop if they want to. To un-divide labour so that people operating the camera (usually males) also have to sweep the centre, and production managers also record sound...

To make space for people to step into becoming thinkers: collectively and individually...

That art benefits from certain advantages becomes, for art's self-consciousness and for those who react aesthetically, something better in-itself. This ideological element in art stands in need of permanent self-correction.⁵⁵⁷

To abolish the very definitions that divide tasks, so that pamphlets, reports, film credits behave as if they are in a secret clandestine situation of life and death where naming names could bring attack or investigation by security services, immigration departments, parole boards, schools, parents, and funding buddies...

...the affinity, and the opposition, between art and radical praxis become surprisingly clear. Both envision a universe which, while originating in the given social relationships, also liberates individuals from these relationships. This vision appears as the permanent future of revolutionary praxis.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ Borrowed from a colleague/comrade.

⁵⁵⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 241.

⁵⁵⁸ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic*, 71.

To make space for people who have confidence, interest or knowledge in the technical: but they do not dominate and do not become the cinematographer in the credits or the (usually male) star of the workshop...

To ask of people that they get involved in different aspects, learn different tasks and skills: as many as possible and to the maximum extent possible. To facilitate in a way that highlights overlap between roles and tasks so that the “skill” of framing, as it is discussed and trained leaks over into the way one speaks to a local shop owner for assistance with an outdoor shoot. Each task is an intellectual and political series of skills that belongs to the whole process...

Specialization means losing sight of the raw effort of constructing either art or knowledge; as a result you cannot view knowledge and art as choices and decisions, commitments and alignments, but only in terms of impersonal theories or methodologies....Specialization also kills your sense of excitement and discovery, both of which are irreducibly present in the intellectual's makeup.⁵⁵⁹

To decentralise artist or trainer (paid and unpaid) as much as possible, so that knowledge that people have of local area and its image possibilities and sonic worlds, sensibilities and details of problems can direct the process and be acted upon in discussion and tasks. Local knowledge infuses into the content and form of the artwork, organises the shot in the church courtyard, researches a movement of light, or considers the best location and time to record atmosphere...

The language will be anybody's, but tightened by the poet's back-bone.⁵⁶⁰

While facilitators/artists agitate, disrupt and keep militant experiment with form as focus, while keeping technical or skills expertise actively in critique of power: humble and conscious of its instant ability to dominate, granted and promoted by the wider world in its reification of artist, teacher, coordinator and sector. Knowledge and power must submit to being challenged and mediated by what comes from the group, in the same way that content is mediated by form...

History, standardisation and homogenisation

To always remain political and historical at every point so that all technology and all aesthetic decisions are guilty until we work them otherwise...

⁵⁵⁹ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 77.

⁵⁶⁰ Amiri Baraka, “The Revolutionary Theatre,” in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 237-38.

We must realize that as our digital content is launched, color-corrected, exported, rendered and saved, the contracts and transactions that take place between our content and the software we use commit our art practices to a flow of circuitry that can be characterized as the political economy of new media.⁵⁶¹

To discuss the rules and then consciously break them while understanding why: high angles and their manufacture of privilege, the way a camera can stalk like a jealous violent man or the way it can violate the content of a shot, pornographically stroking with long or sweeping or panning shots, the way light and colour create racism, or the way depth of field is used to simplistically define the real and its struggles into flatness or two dimensionality of background and foreground, even while claiming the three...

Conscious anti/crafting means we understand that no decision is an accident and each arises out of a social and historical discussion and politically informed decision...

To refuse to rely on the technology and its standardised options that can normally and naturally dominate the work. Insist on the manual so that people learn the concept as they focus and set, and the project enacts the principle that corporate automatic functions can never know the content, as much as people who live it...

Record original sounds that come from the context (locations and lives) of the project...

Low tech, even if it is about project or community poverty, is never an excuse and can be consciously embraced against myths of progression, market forces and consumerism that can encourage passivity, elitism and homogenisation. Fight poverty with the brilliance of ideas generated through process...

Use effects on sound under the guide of the aesthetic program and not the need to decorate, create useless meaning or display technical bravado. Train sound effects against their privilege and their ostentatious tendency, as clandestine weapons that create becomings in the work...

⁵⁶¹ Chan, "The Unbearable Lightness."

By teaching technology against the grain, the possibility of a pedagogical space immune to the anxiety of progress opens. This imaginary space gives student artists and artist teachers the room to re-imagine the place of technology in their practice, reformulate its tools to suit a critical aesthetic...⁵⁶²

Surveillance and reception

To undo the increasing tendency to monitor and observe the people we work with, even for the gathering of statistics, the next funding round and even if the (child) psychologist is smiling...

To say no to the local journalist who wants to “pop in.” To keep observers (and the evaluation form) outside the door and refuse to photocopy identity cards for the funding buddy...

To not worry if anyone will understand the art work and to drop the concern that the group’s work be accessible to the outside...

More often, reception wears away what constitutes the work's determinate negation of society.⁵⁶³

To protect the process from falsified representations by institutions; stakeholders encouraged to provide stakes with no investment returns. To question requests for documentation: and if forced, to make sabotaging the concept of documentation another concern. To make happy children sitting around a mixer unusable for the industry magazine and the delighted oohs and ahhs of observers: to use camera angles and expressions that do not say thank you...

To make the logo unrecognisable to its owner...

To question dominant didactic modes of documentation and consider archives of a project that do not so much depict, but create questions and difficulties that must be worked for and followed by those wishing to know about the project...

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Adorno, *Aesthetic*, 228.

...alternative processes that integrate the knowledge of personal narratives into artistic projects in ways that do not breach the privacy of vulnerable individuals or reflect negatively on them, their loved ones, or associates.⁵⁶⁴

To refuse objectification of marginalised peoples who so often carry the burden of having to be ready to talk about themselves and their own lives in order to highlight a problem. Example: Aesthetic focus on the construction of white (or dominant) identities, rather than identities of the “othered,” could be a more critical way of speaking about racism (oppression)...

Poetics and (anti common) sense

To stand against every “normal” image and sound, and to look for the invisible in the visible...

To facilitate discussion so that people start to think less descriptively and work their ideas as image and sound, assisted by trainers/artists asking questions about distance, angle, volume, colour, light, speed. How form draws out the feeling or sense, becoming the narrative...

As part of the workshops, they’re asked to elaborate on their chosen topic, their chosen issue, how the form of presentation relates to the subject matter.⁵⁶⁵

To challenge dominant ideas of the visual. Cut light, darken the room and re craft while keeping the three point lighting system of the culture industry firmly under attack for its racist, sexist and classist paramilitary role in oppression, while not falling into another hollywood trick of using yellow/orange nuclear colourwash that creates the eerie and strange...

To imagine shadow as sonic force...

...capture a flash of friction in time and make it burn as bright as the night is long.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁴ Martin Thiele and Sally Marsden, *Engaging Art: The Artful Dodgers Studio. A Theoretical Model of Practice* (Victoria: Jesuit Social Services, 2003), 90.

⁵⁶⁵ Stewart, “Digital Diaspora,” 163.

⁵⁶⁶ Paul Chan, “What Art is and Where it Belongs,” *e-flux* 10 (November 2009), <https://web.archive.org/web/20140630022724/http://www.e-flux.com/journal/what-art-is-and-where-it-belongs/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

To question how narrative is made. To teach against the “establishing” shot, the trite voice over, or the talking head and the very concept of having to explain or showcase (the self)...

To love silence, to make silence...

To dislocate rather than connect, to distance rather than personalise (or privatise)...

To resist the tendency to ask about meaning, themes, issues; or to focus on what the work is “about” when using images, sounds, films, plays, or literature to be analysed. To make space for other ways to read or sense the details: and how they may go beyond describing and representing. How does the gut think and the brain feel? What is a particular detail? How is it made? Why is it made this way? What is its sense? How did it feel? What was it trying to change?

To teach close up as a way to transform reality: not symbolism or metaphor but a physical image transformation. Shoot a stick so that it looks like itself, then discuss and try to shoot so that it symbolises the violent stick/baton of child abuse/violent police that keeps coming up in discussion. Now how can it be shot so that it becomes or transforms into that stick or baton terrifying, as if in motion. Now crack it with sound...

To watch images with eyes closed and to listen to sounds from different locations and distances. To sonically find layers made invisible by the dominant audio world...

Sound snatches you into the skin you’re in, abducts you into your own body, activates the bio-logic of thought, encourages your organs to revolt from hierarchy.⁵⁶⁷

To teach sound as autonomous. It does not decorate or enhance image. It is a possibility to become its own story in its own way...

To enter into the abstracted possibilities and difficulties of sound ... so that “...skin starts to feel what your ears can't.”⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁷ Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998), 149.

Six: practice as production, politics and training

Beginnings and context

The following piece widens the scope of community arts, taking it into overlap with literature and school learning. Across sessions of leftover time (state funded after school classes in south west immigrant Sydney), content and form of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* are critiqued. Different to other practice writings, it works from a frame of critically analysing an established piece of work (canonical western literature), rather than the frame of creating a new one. But inside critical analysis are strategies of production that help move towards re/imaginings, and away from description.

Revolutionary leadership cannot...Denounce reality without knowing reality...Know reality without relying on the people as well as on objective facts for the source of its knowledge.⁵⁶⁹

The piece begins by doing its own hard work before it runs to revolution. The first part analyses the racism of the novel, both as form and content. It can be considered research preparation for the practice writing that follows, which seeks to pedagogically disrupt its privilege. Practice is taken directly from working life and lapses into (unfortunate) depiction as it stumbles over recollections. Methods and strategies that transpired somewhat accidentally exist more consciously, in the present of these writings. They relate to critiquing and experimenting with spoken words and literature, which I believe (consistent with Baraka's struggles of poetry on paper), is more difficult and elusive than working with form and content in sound and image.

The writings also stumble onto a realisation that past practice was trying to create pedagogical platforms, or positions of strength from which students/participants can critically analyse and produce. Paulo Freire's concept of denouncing and announcing has helped to articulate this sentiment. Denouncing/announcing is a dialectic and simultaneous process of naming injustice in the lives of people in a class or "cultural circle," while working for its demise from inside the pedagogical process: "...reflective action to achieve that 'announced' future which is being born

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 76.

⁵⁶⁹ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, trans. Loretta Slover (England: Penguin, 1975), 71

within the denunciation.”⁵⁷⁰ While teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, practice in south west Sydney begins with the naming of injustice in literature as “objective fact” to be resisted and disrupted, rather than perceptions or perspectives that can slide too comfortably into privilege: “...discursive practices that collapse flexibility, self-direction, and so on serve as storage sites for the unspoken message of race beneath the text of contemporary learning.”⁵⁷¹

In a detailed critical account of her teaching of the same novel, Canadian high school teacher Carol Ricker-Wilson urges her students to consider how black characters are depicted by Lee.⁵⁷² But she doesn’t unequivocally name the racism herself, and sets no precedent or discussion about how the novel perpetuates racism in content and form. These are both urgent sentiments of *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* by Toni Morrison, a text she cites as her guide. Her pedagogical position “...defaults to a generic white subject,”⁵⁷³ offloading the responsibility for naming oppression onto those without the status (as white and/or teacher) that could protect them from the same dangers she recognises for black characters in the text.

Instead Ricker-Wilson set preliminary exercises into African civilisations and history during which culture/s (dancing), scenes of slavery and research about African discoveries were presented. She cites the comment of a student: “A friend of mine has always wished she was white. Now I can finally send her some material that proves that Africans are intelligent, cultured people.”⁵⁷⁴ Ricker-Wilson was pleased with the state style multicultural unfolding of presentations, while the onus on black people to prove they are intelligent passes unrecognised.

Ricker-Wilson’s strong intention was to teach the novel in an anti racist manner. The self critique in her article is thoughtful and frank, but never quite arrives at critiquing the heavy reliance on descriptive approaches and exercises: in particular, the constant pedagogical focus on the brutalities and violence committed against black people. Somehow Ricker-Wilson expected black students to identify with this history, as if the legacies and traces of racism (past and present) do not provide enough stress and (often unspoken) pain on their own.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, 41.

⁵⁷¹ Sue Shore, “Destabilising or recuperating whiteness? (un)mapping ‘the self’ of agentic learning discourses,” in *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, Aboriginal Studies Press, ed. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 94.

⁵⁷² Carol Ricker-Wilson, “When the Mockingbird Becomes an Albatross: Reading and Resistance in the Language Arts Classroom,” *English Journal* 87, no. 3 (1998), 68.

⁵⁷³ Shore, “Destabilising,” 98.

⁵⁷⁴ Ricker-Wilson, “When the Mockingbird,” 68.

The use of extra texts by black writers relied on the same cycle of recounting oppression: and like the novel served to disappear black resistance, both in the history of America and in black literature. Her descriptive emphasis on identity and suffering seems to have erased self determined literary moments existing in the work of writers like Toni Morrison and James Baldwin: a kind of critical play between degradations of slavery and racism, and the construction of complex literary subjectivities.⁵⁷⁵ The novels by black writers were also not given the status of great works of art or centralised as important historical literary texts: another position of strength from which black (and other) students could denounce/announce.

Ricker-Wilson recognises the despair of black students, and their objectification “...as objects of a lesson on racism for white students.”⁵⁷⁶ But she believes this is not only because of her pedagogy, but because of who they are and how they read. It is “...their subject-specific understanding of, and engagement with the novel that elicited their troubled response to it...” and not so much the fact that the text is objectively offensive. Indeed Ricker-Wilson’s discussion seems to want to make space for a (privileged) white subject reading of the text, even as she discusses whiteness and power.⁵⁷⁷

This lingering wonderful world of difference also leads to a simplistic paralleling of depictions of black men by white people, and their depictions by black women. Again, power structures, even while referenced are disappeared into “...liberal humanism to tidy the edges of systemic disadvantage while the hegemonic reproduction of disadvantage remains intact.”⁵⁷⁸ It is only right at the end that Ricker-Wilson finally includes a piece of black literature as “canon,” or as centred source of critical knowledge about American history and black and white peoples. But the absence of clearly naming racism as “objective fact” in the novel, and cycles of description (rather than disruption) pacifying black identity, are never consciously considered as obstacles to the kind of pedagogy Ricker-Wilson seemed to want.

⁵⁷⁵ Like the subjectivities created by Alexis Wright in *Carpentaria*, acts of literary resistance that disrupt established forms and content. Amiri Baraka’s *The Slave* (1964) provides another example of complex character construction: a play which unfolds a scene between a black militant and his white ex-wife. Outside, there has been a successful revolution and black people have seized the nation. This disruption of white control is put in contradictory play with critical and reflexive interrogations of the male protagonist.

⁵⁷⁶ Ricker-Wilson, “When the Mockingbird,” 70.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, 71.

⁵⁷⁸ Shore, “Destabilising,” 96-97.

The work of Paulo Freire has influenced my working life, and is also present here in the general resistant sentiment of the research; and in the deconstruction of hegemonic knowledge as intrinsic to, or in fact a launching ground of community arts process.⁵⁷⁹ But there are also points of difference. Freire's concept of transformation was couched within the energies of wider class and anti colonial revolutionary movements, while often arriving at dialectic closures/announcements of new futures. The transformation of this research happens back inside the workshop as aesthetic imagination materialising as resistant process: in a neoliberal context of much less "hope" and/or absence of revolutionary movements, and with a methodological suspicion of the establishment of the "true." Perhaps consistent with the times, Freire also seemed to arrive too easily at statements and conclusions about marginalised people. This research has struggled to keep a careful distance from assumptions about those who take part in community arts.

Till now I have mainly discussed form as a way to create positions of strength. But the spirit of denouncing/announcing as a resistant pedagogical sentiment and "historical commitment"⁵⁸⁰ (defended by Freire as "true" precisely because it is utopian), also helps to articulate the naming of injustice/s as a beginning from which to practice: or "objective fact" on which marginalised students and/or students interested in cultural resistance can stand. A way of levelling fields of power before inviting students into the "dirty and ruthless"⁵⁸¹ wars of representation: to make pedagogical space away from the "what," and to focus on *how* literature (art) constructs and creates oppression in content and form, and how it could be disrupted.

Section six then crosses to the other side of the world (also from past working life), and returns to the frame of creating new art with sound and image. The final two pieces then rest in unidentified locations/contexts to instigate more imaginings in the particularities of process: not directly taken from working life, but still taking from its presence (as memory and reflection). They invite participants to denounce/announce while fully engaged in conceptualising and producing, from the beginning till the end. The writings attempt to further practice what I mean by process as autonomous moments of politics, production and training.

⁵⁷⁹ Freire's ideas are also often uncritically taken to community work and community arts, and used as a kind of insurance policy. A thorough engagement with his work would need to critically analyse this presence in the field.

⁵⁸⁰ Freire, *Cultural Action*, 40.

⁵⁸¹ Isaac Saney, "The Case Against to Kill a Mockingbird," *Race Class* 45, no. 1 (2003): 104.

Dismantling a piece of the canon in after school leftover time

De birds all hated it mighty bad when they seen him in hell, so they tried to git him out. But the fire was too hot so they give up - all but de mockin' birds. They come together and decided to tote sand until they squenched de fire in hell. So they set a day and they all agreed on it. Every Friday they totes sand to hell. And that's how come nobody don't ever see no mockin' bird on Friday.⁵⁸²

Zora Neale Hurston's *From Mules to Men*, first published in 1935 is a black folkloric chronicle gathered with and by the imaginations, histories and knowledge of black people in north America in different communities. In the area of Lakeland, Florida among men and women working as indentured labourers for a lumber company, Hurston is told the mockingbird story while trekking through a swamp-like forest to get to a fishing spot. Further down the continent in Mexico twenty years later, Juan Rulfo writes the mockingbird so that it almost leaves the page.

At dawn a heavy rain was falling over the earth. It thudded dully as it struck the soft loose dust of the furrows. A mockingbird swooped low across the field and wailed, imitating a child's plaint; a little farther it sang something that sounded like a sob of weariness and in the distance where the horizon had begun to clear, it hiccupped and then laughed, only to wail once more.⁵⁸³

It is only after the mockingbird has completed its incantations that a human character subject appears. He begins by breathing. But because he is a character who works for the interests of the feudal landowners, the mockingbird has pre-empted his eyes looking for the rain "penetrating the furrows"⁵⁸⁴ of the land.

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee, the hard working, independent and ethical mockingbird of black folklore is reduced to landscape for signification of human emotions, silenced and stilled in two of the three references in the novel. "The feeling grew until the atmosphere in the courtroom was exactly the same as a cold February morning, when the

⁵⁸² Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 94-95.

⁵⁸³ Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Paramo*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 61.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 61.

mockingbirds were still.”⁵⁸⁵ The resistant subjectivity of the character bird in *Pedro Paramo* disappears into human being as presence (and hero of literature), while nature as absence waits for him. “Nothing is more deadly than a deserted, waiting street. The trees were still, the mockingbirds were silent.”⁵⁸⁶

To Kill a Mockingbird is conventionally considered one of the best works of anti racist twentieth century American literature. For many years it has featured prominently and excessively on the study curricula of western schools, including those in Australia. There have also been many criticisms of the novel as perpetuating racism, rather than working against it. Many of these writings and activities come from black American and Canadian scholars and organisers in the fields of education, law and literary theory. I would like to draw from some of these, as well as the novel itself to discuss some of the ways racism is perpetuated through its content and form.

Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.⁵⁸⁷

The above lines are often cited as evidence of the novel's “...most eloquent literary antiracist statement.”⁵⁸⁸ This humanist interpretation is consistent with the hierarchical logic of the quote: which imprisons the mockingbird into serving human activity and emotion. Through its obedience, it earns the right to be protected. Educator Isaac Saney argues that these lines reveal a central point of racism in the novel that positions man/nature as black, and human as white, reproducing the same relations of power across race.

By foisting this mockingbird image on African Americans, the novel does not challenge the insidious conception of superior versus inferior...of those meant to rule versus those meant to be ruled. What it attacks are the worst...excesses of the racist social order, leaving the racist social order itself intact.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁵ Harper Lee. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: McIntosh and Otis, 1960), 214.
<http://www.gardenhomeslutheran.org/home/2311/3660/Images/ToKillaMockingbird-FullText.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2016).

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 98.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 93.

⁵⁸⁸ Saney, “The Case Against,” 101-02.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 102.

Scout, the white child narrator of the novel repeats the idea that killing a mockingbird is a sin, to avert the violent “excess” of white extremism. Her father Atticus Finch (the lawyer defending Tom Robinson accused of raping a nineteen year old white girl) has stationed himself at the prison where Tom is being held and faces the white lynch mob that arrives. The novel constructs a scene where a terror attack on a black person is only averted when he is reduced to a more animal status, and by the agency of white characters. Black people never become fully “human” within the character constructions of the novel and remain somewhere in the liminal space of white supremacy discussed by Aileen Moreton Robinson.

Black people are positioned somewhere between White man and animal: Thus, the universalisation and normalisation of whiteness as the representation of humanity worked to locate the racialised other in the liminal space between the human/animal distinction. This ‘other’ may have attributes of both but is never exclusively human or animal...whiteness is defined by what it is not (animal or liminal), thereby staking an exclusive claim to the truly human. In this way, racial superiority becomes a part of one’s ontology, albeit unconsciously, and informs the white subject’s knowledge production.⁵⁹⁰

Even Calpurnia, the most present black character of the novel and the nanny of the Finch household, is constructed through her relations with the white family, and through their world views. The scene where Calpurnia takes Scout and her brother Jem to the black church, demonstrates directly and more insidiously, the way the novel leaves the racist social order intact in its form and content. This is one of the only scenes where the reader is taken into a black social setting, but the potential to create complex black literary characters is denied by language and choice of observation. Black characters are present but their agency made absent, mostly depicted by the white child who experiences them as a “mass of colored people”⁵⁹¹ and through a “...warm bittersweet smell of clean Negro.”⁵⁹²

Even though the children are welcomed by the congregation and seated at the front, black people are written as undifferentiated, a mass (pack) constantly referred to as “them” and positioned inside the liminal space manufactured by whiteness. They exist through various smells, Calpurnia’s strange eyes or fingers digging into Scout’s shoulders. Here racism lives in the

⁵⁹⁰ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, “Whiteness, Epistemology and Indigenous Representation,” in *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 77.

⁵⁹¹ Lee, *To Kill*, 120.

⁵⁹² *Ibid*, 119.

form: the choice of language, sentence construction, tone and use of the pronoun “them,” buried into a naivety or innocence of the child.⁵⁹³ The language and character construction in this scene is very different to the individualised character constructions of even the white Klu Klux clan members of the novel and even those hostile towards her father, betraying a white solidarity⁵⁹⁴ in form (and content), that subjugates black literary presence.

...a master narrative that spoke for Africans and their descendents, or of them. The legislator’s narrative could not coexist with a response from the Africanist persona...the slave’s own narrative, while freeing the narrator in many ways, did not destroy the master narrative. The master narrative could make any number of adjustments to keep itself intact.⁵⁹⁵

As the (frightened) children walk down the aisle, Zeebo “the garbage collector” comes to greet them. “One of them stepped from the crowd.”⁵⁹⁶ It is only later when Scout is asking questions that the plot (content) reveals Zeebo as Calpurnia’s first born, and not when it would make sense for Calpurnia to express joy or pride in her son (whom she taught to read) as he leads the congregation in song. And when Calpurnia insists that Jem keep the dime his father gave him for the collection box, Jem’s “innate courtesy”⁵⁹⁷ is observed by Scout. Jem accepts the dime from Calpurnia whose dignity and generosity go unmentioned, let alone described as innate. Calpurnia’s goodness as it relates to the Finch family is replaced by a child’s dull and simplistic curiosity about her world as “...she was talking like the rest of them.”⁵⁹⁸ And when Jem chides Calpurnia for speaking “nigger-talk,”⁵⁹⁹ her response that she prefers not to put on airs, denies Calpurnia any pride or defence of black idiom. The impunity with which a white child can scold a black woman (who raised him), also embeds an act nurtured by slavery into the novel’s content.

In its form the novel also adheres to standardised structure and progression of time. The present of the novel is years after the events it narrates, but there is a lack of consciousness about the potential of time lapse to story construction. The technique of distance could have been used to create literary challenges to the racism it is often claimed Lee was trying to “show.” Instead, the

⁵⁹³ Diann L. Baecker, “The Africanist Presence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” in *Racism in Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird*, ed. Candice Mancini (Michigan: Greenhaven Press, 2008), 100.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid, 159.

⁵⁹⁵ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 50.

⁵⁹⁶ Lee, *To Kill*, 120.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid, 121.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, 120.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 127.

racism of Monroeville, Alabama (Lee's hometown) is re/produced again and again. The "introduced"⁶⁰⁰ memory (of the older white child), as it is in the products of the culture industry is also neat and complete, false in its claim to depiction. And the use of colour coded language is incessant, in reference to the white of skins, light switches constantly going on and off, and light as inspiration for narrative events. Locked inside hierarchical binary constructions, the material forces of racism that Saney writes about are re/produced through the language of colour.

a cracking of bullets
 and the word night
 a ripping of taffeta
 the word nigger
 dense, right?
 from the thunder of a summer
 appropriated by
 Incredulous liberties⁶⁰¹

The novel also directly reproduces the language of supremacy and the word "nigger" is used 48 times along with other derogatory terms.⁶⁰² The most directly racist representations of black people, like "flaring nostrils and beautiful teeth"⁶⁰³ are used during a conversation between the white children about race and people of mixed descent. And in another scene, Tom Robinson is described through "...the whites of his eyes shone in his face..."⁶⁰⁴ and except for his crippled hand "... would have been a fine specimen of a man."⁶⁰⁵ These historically colonial statements go unchallenged in the narration of the novel, even though the distance of time offered a technique for reflection.

Black characters are never written as fully historical and social beings but exist, like the mockingbird to facilitate or enable the actions (good and bad) of white characters,⁶⁰⁶ while the onus is on them to make white people feel comfortable that the status quo will not change. They wait "...patiently at the doors behind the white families,"⁶⁰⁷ intimidated into a static existence.

⁶⁰⁰ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 53.

⁶⁰¹ Aimé Césaire, *Lost Body*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (New York: George Braziller, 1986), 11.

⁶⁰² Saney, "The Case Against," 100.

⁶⁰³ Lee, *To Kill*, 163.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, 196.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, 196.

⁶⁰⁶ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 50.

⁶⁰⁷ Lee, *To Kill*, 164.

The popularity and heart-warming poignancy...buries the very real activism and resistance of black citizens in Alabama...right at the time that Lee wrote her story. Its publication made invisible the very people it claimed to care about.⁶⁰⁸

Lula, who objects to the presence of the children at the black church, is an exception. But the presence of a more militant black sentiment is vilified through the description of Lula as "...bullet-headed with strange almond-shaped eyes, straight nose, and an Indian-bow mouth."⁶⁰⁹ A legitimate concern (or anger), that it could be safer for black people not to associate with whites is denigrated through her portrayal as nasty and hostile to Calpurnia, while any promise of black solidarity is erased. Despondency and passivity are legitimised in the novel, while black militancy and resistance are erased from Lee's "showing" of the real.

"The novel is set in the 1930s and portrays Blacks as somnolent, awaiting someone from outside to take up and fight for the cause of justice."⁶¹⁰ Resistance is preserved for Atticus Finch, whose "...moral courage forms a critical part of the novel's deceptive surface."⁶¹¹ Scholar and lawyer Monroe Freedman has noted that Finch could never be considered a serious anti racist. His character demonstrates "complacency" to racism rather than desire for change. He does not freely choose to defend Tom and his insistence on civility towards black people is less about change or justice and more about a sense of his own goodness.⁶¹² Finch also makes statements that seem to normalise the Klu Klux Klan, while trivialising the repercussions of its crimes.⁶¹³

Isaac Saney argues that the novel repeatedly distorts the history of black/white relations, both in its denial of black initiative and leadership, and because there is no historical precedent or real instance from this time of a white lawyer in Alabama defending an accused black person. He says the opposite is true with documented accounts of "respectable" people taking part in

⁶⁰⁸ Colin Dayan, "Waiting for the New Atticus Finch," *Al Jazeera America*, July 14, 2015, http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/7/waiting-for-the-new-atticus-finch.html?utm_content=opinion&utm_campaign=ajam&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=SocialFlow (accessed March 20, 2016).

⁶⁰⁹ Lee, *To Kill*, 120.

⁶¹⁰ Saney, "The Case Against," 103.

⁶¹¹ Eric J. Sundquist, "To Kill a Mockingbird: A Paradox," in *Racism in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird*, ed. Candice Mancini (Michigan: Greenhaven Press, 2008), 133.

⁶¹² Monroe H. Freedman, "Atticus Finch - Right and Wrong," in *Racism in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird*, ed. Candice Mancini (Michigan: Greenhaven Press, 2008), 74.

⁶¹³ *Ibid*, 70.

lynching.⁶¹⁴ While the history of the crime Tom is accused of - systematic rape as a tool of subjugation by white men (often with the complicity of white women) - is absent. Lee's gender sentiments are reserved for white people only and certainly never for black women, except in Scout's paralleling of gender bias in Reverend Sykes' sermon in church, with sermons in the white church. Scout's gender observation is a more sophisticated narrative point, but firmly in the tradition of the erasure in representation of other women's lives and struggle.

There are instances in the novel where Finch seems to condemn society more structurally, but he does not leave the realm of paternalism where the solution lies in protecting black people, rather than changing society. After being found guilty, Tom is sent to prison and soon after murdered by the guards, shot seventeen times. Finch does not believe the state's story that Tom was trying to escape, but his death is a passing fact, a cold reality not deserving of much pause, and dealt with using the coldness as brutality reserved for black deaths in representation.⁶¹⁵ "I guess Tom was tired of white men's chances and preferred to take his own. Ready, Cal?"⁶¹⁶ Another character "...likened Tom's death to the senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children."⁶¹⁷ And Helen is not only harmed by the news of her husband's death in plot, but also by the cold words of Lee writing her falling "...down in the dirt, like a giant with a big foot just came along and stepped on her."⁶¹⁸

South west Sydney

When it was my turn as a student to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I also urged Atticus Finch onto victory for mankind. With changes in political consciousness came more complexity, and as an after school tutor a few years after leaving school, I passed the novel again. When faced with the responsibility of teaching, I reread and began to recognise the way literature can be racist in its content and form: that racism was one reason why the novel seemed stunted in its development as a piece of literature, reinforcing the logic of an oppressive real. Leftover time, the scraps granted by the state government to "improve literacy and numeracy" contained some kind of freedom: away from the gaze of schools, the program coordinator and tucked away in a council

⁶¹⁴ Saney, "The Case Against," 102. Also documented by the online exhibition: James Allen and John Littlefield, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, <http://withoutsanctuary.org/> (accessed October 6, 2016).

⁶¹⁵ bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Class and Sex at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 44.

⁶¹⁶ Lee, *To Kill*, 239.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, 244.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, 244.

community centre after council workers had gone home. It became a space of a type of freedom to focus on critical analysis of representation, mostly left out of the school work young people brought with them: while negotiating the tension between supporting young people to reach school certificates and institutional milestones, and using up the leftovers to teach against them.

Most of the young women in the group had not bothered to read the novel and had never felt compelled to. From a preliminary group reading of small sections and the knowledge that some had from school discussion, a sense of the narrative, characters and motifs of the book was patched together. Facilitated by my suggestions, the discussion unfolded and we began to construct awareness about the invisibility of black characters. I suggested we get to know the novel by attempting to rewrite it: in particular to try and write black characters as more complex and active. The young women agreed but refused to write, suggesting they discuss and act. Different questions to different characters were asked, and rewriting began through discussion and theatre, stopping and starting according to when someone wanted to raise a point. It was theatre without a need for an external audience: a theatre of pedagogy and re/productions, rowdy, serious, funny and sometimes very stupid with atrociously bad “quality” acting.

We asked questions to Tom Robinson in prison. We asked about his dreams and his suffering at being away from his family and the prospect of facing the full legal and social onslaught of white supremacy. How did it feel to be reduced in the novel to a crippled left hand? We discussed bravery in situations of life and death. And Helen Robinson, Tom’s wife: how was she doing in the running of the house on her own, financially and in supporting her family? We learn in the novel that the black community is supporting her, but the details of her life are almost invisible. What kind of conversations was she having with other people in the community? So many came to the court, but we never get to know them in the novel. What did they think of the lawyer? Did they think that using the legal system was the best way to fight injustice against black people? Weren’t they angry? What did they think about their anger being so invisible in the novel?

“Criticism of this type will show how that narrative is used in the construction of a history and a context for whites by positing history-lessness and context-lessness for blacks.”⁶¹⁹ My intention was to facilitate dissection of the text and its literary racism: to ask questions and unfold scenarios made invisible by its representation. I was concerned that sessions not remain

⁶¹⁹ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 53.

satisfied with explaining or describing “what is” at the expense of thinking about how the “is” (constructed truths) could be disrupted. Looking at form and content and how representations are constructed, meant it was easier to identify and discuss the phenomena of how a book can be racist. Actively changing and rewriting the text assisted in its deconstruction. And the idea of disrupting and resisting, offered as a beginning, was an appealing invitation for most of the young women, who then in their own ways, moved the workshops (and others) along.

On a teaching resource website of the English Department of Melbourne High School, a critical view of the novel is offered, with questions that probe those similar to the ones raised by Isaac Saney. “The novel presents African Americans as passive victims who accept the prejudice they experience.”⁶²⁰ The normalising of derogatory racist terms is also discussed. Under a heading “Challenging the Text,” the website states: “One way to challenge racism is to rewrite it,” and proceeds with a paragraph for Atticus Finch, making him more critical and aware of black resistance, including the Underground Railway networks which supported the escape of slaves into northern states. The concern that black people tell their own history is absent, and the rewriting of the novel is unambitious in its challenge to racism. The example, while adding an important stage of black resistance, can still uphold an idea that holds the racism of the south, in contrast to the non racism of the north: a simplistic distinction challenged by many thinkers.

I took the lessons into form, without really understanding what form actually was and how I would teach with it. It was chaotic and confusing, for both the students and me. I asked the young women to look through the novel and find language that was indirectly racist. How does the novel present symbolics of light? And what meaning does light have? What kind of voices could characters speak in? What kind of sentences would they use? Do characters actually need to speak to have a presence? How could characters be imagined and make action in narrative while not speaking. How could anger be expressed in a novel or in the written form? Voice, tone, volume, length, choice of language, mixing of languages and vocabulary, speed and pace were experimented with, without really understanding their significance to narrative making which wants to disrupt structures of power.

⁶²⁰ George Marotous and Merren Ward, “To Kill a Mockingbird: English Website Unit,” *English Faculty, Melbourne High School*, <http://resources.mhs.vic.edu.au/mockingbird/racism.htm> (accessed March 25, 2016).

There were also instances of stereotyping black Americans during the workshops, mostly based on commercial music and video clips, where I would feel a need to step in and question. I moved discussion into histories, including slavery: a history more familiar to the young people than the novel, through the interest of some in hip hop and from past listening to Malcolm X speeches in class. The discussion began to draw lines between history and the present of the novel, a process made uncritically too easy by the fact that we were not discussing our own historical suffering.⁶²¹ A pedagogical strategy was to centralise resistant histories as a way to work against the danger of reproducing the approach of the novel and the racism of (we) non black people.

As they often do, discussions about “real” history and the social went on for too long without me the “teacher” knowing how to pull them back into literature. Discussions about racism went on for even longer, spilling way too much into a personal very far from a black American experience and even further from the novel. Somehow I dragged the workshops back: this time with no pedagogical strategy, and fighting against my own tendencies to discuss. I felt that literature and the novel itself needed to remain the centre (rather than “real life” or “real history”) to explore how racism gets made in representation or in narrative. A type of learning I was hoping students could take with them, and sustain against representation in general.

The young women had been told that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was an anti racist novel. The focus on text as literary content and form, challenged this claim and exposed how text can create a racist social order within its world, while at the same time distorting and reproducing the racism of the real. Racism, which the young women as young Lebanese Muslims in south west Sydney (and I) thought we knew in some way, became more complex: not contained and simplified by our personal experiences. The way it slithers through everything, literature included, insidiously hidden as form, became connected up with so many other sources of media and information.

For example, while looking through a magazine supplement of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, I found an advertisement for an exhibition of paintings, featuring “White Frangipanis” by Robert Cook. The flowers are starkly present in the piece while the faces of the Polynesian women dissolve into the background, their features indistinguishable from landscape: a classic piece of colonial art that reproduces the white supremacist positioning of black people described above

⁶²¹ Or Arab racism against “blackness” and colonisation/slavery by Arab/Islamic empires as they moved into Africa (and still do): back then I didn’t know, today I would try to discuss, despite a pan-Islamism which obviously includes and is sometimes driven by Africans.

by Moreton-Robinson. The exercise was to write a review of this art together. Sentence by sentence we thrashed out the problems with the work and its use of colour and background. The girls included the piece itself in the review, rewriting the name of the artist and adding the final touch of an “r” between the letters “c” and “o.” We sent it in protest, signing off from Bankstown, south west Sydney. They never replied, which didn’t worry anyone.

At the time I had a rudimentary understanding and a strong gut feeling. If I was to teach with this text now I would delve in more detail with the craft of writing, break down sentences and words to explore the way atmosphere, mood, tone and colour are conventionally constructed to service those in power. I would try to discuss the way direct description dominates and stifles imagination and other ways to sense the world in literature. I would ask people to try to express a sentiment or a mood without using adjectives: to paint images with words (writing or speaking) that make language struggle to become the moment expressed rather than represent it. And because some of my work has been with people who do not want to write, or were never taught how, perhaps I would ask that people speak their experiments: together, or on their own. I would request that people forget about introductions and conclusions. That climax is not that important, and a boring formula making narrative predictable. Could the whole duration of a two line story have the same intensity that climax is meant to have?

Postscript

Now, with scores of black people taunted, choked, thrown to the ground, killed by police as well as by white citizens and after the June 17 massacre...at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, perhaps the forthcoming novel promises a welcome escape from the facts of racism in this country. That’s both the problem and the secret to its success.⁶²²

In 2015 a sequel to the novel was published. Harper Collins reported that pre-orders were the highest for any book in its publishing history. According to news and magazine reports *Go Set A Watchman* was written before, and that after requests from publishers Lee rewrote it as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Scout now lives in New York. During a visit back to Alabama her father’s separatist views are revealed. Most news reports express shock or disillusionment that Atticus Finch is depicted as an overt racist who decries the new, post segregation status of black people

⁶²² Dayan, “Waiting for the New Atticus Finch.”

in the 1950s setting of the novel. Others note that this surprise is testament to the liberal humanism with which *To Kill a Mockingbird* was received: "...especially in the 1960s, could a novel about black people who do not go gently into the night be called classic?"⁶²³

After war and aesthetic Right of Return

The following pieces take from a village to village project between **ستديو المخيمات** StudioCamps members and young members of a major secular Lebanese leftist party, after the cessation of the July War of 2006. The war devastated three quarters of the villages in Lebanon's deep south and huge areas of the southern suburbs of Beirut, displacing over half the Lebanese population. In each village two to three intense production and training days unfolded to conceptualise and produce a piece of sound and image poetry.

After the war - along with millions of unexploded cluster bomb fragments and other "ordinances" buried in olive groves, backyards, parsley patches and river beds - the south was swarming. Journalists filed reports, and groups on solidarity visits staged press conferences in front of the ruins denouncing the aggression. NGOs organised workshops and handed out cameras and crayons for children to draw their trauma, and money flooded in from donors to begin "emergency" aid, while many new (suspicious) NGOs appeared. It became clear that some had been gearing up to enter as soon as the bombs stopped, because their appearance was like magic, instantaneous and domineering as some attempted to collect statistics on households in southern villages, in the name of the father, the community and emergency aid.⁶²⁴

Our red caravan project brought different sensibilities. It was anti welfare (NGO), anti description (journalism) and anti propaganda (solidarity slogan). It wanted to combine the sense of victory felt by people after Hizballah's holding out against the fifth biggest army in the world, with a respect toward the trauma and loss of life and the steadfastness of people during those 33 days. Some of the trainers were Palestinians living in the south who had lost their own. All trainers had lived through the war and had been part of the mass mobilisation of people propelled into civil defence activities to organise and support internally displaced peoples living in parks, schools and other public buildings.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ During this time we heard of instances where workers from such NGOs were kicked out of villages on suspicion of gathering information for surveillance purposes.

The caravan was a rickety red van, and like all vehicles at the time in south Lebanon clung manically to the edges of massively potholed roads and in the absence of any roads, alternative paths through ravines and valleys, sometimes scorched by the phosphorous of biochemical supremacy. As the van moved on, it took with it copies of poetry made, working and screening in each village as it went: in a garage, surviving community centre, or a room in the last house standing on the edge of a shattered village square.

مناشير Leaflets⁶²⁵

In between thousands of propaganda leaflets that fall from the sky, like the wings of birds spliced off by knives announcing the coming of messianic military. Breathes many ideas. It is deceptive. After all the wings of birds are beautiful and the sky even more. Then they reach crisscrossed electricity wires, and crude announcements to evacuate villages and trust the IDF hiss slowly to death. ستيديو المخيمات StudioCamps locates its work at the point of contact between a leaflet and its slow death.⁶²⁶

There is a post production analysis happening through a small cloud of unhealthy but sweet cigarette smoke on a balcony, after a long and intense production session to create the sadistic suction of a vacuum bomb or to give the violent sense of it. The session moves between discussions of real bodily sensations of a vacuum bomb and back to a library of samples to systematically search for a sound that could be worked on. The sound recorder was broken and the project, without the time to wait for a replacement had to rely on sound samples. In between discussion, different sounds are selected and a range of sound effects taught as they are put to work to try to catch a sense of a vacuum bomb, which in reality sucks the air out of buildings, imploding them over those who think the basement could be a safer place to take refuge. After several hours, a final experimentation with pitch manipulation painfully stretches the chosen sound of a body diving into water. Discussion moves back to whether the reverberation should be tweaked to give a sense of a breath that survives in the basement.

⁶²⁵ StudioCamps, مناشير Leaflets, Audiovisual Poetry, 0:30, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3cULzVOv7s> (accessed July 25, 2016). Urging people to leave the area, trust the IDF, or to contact them with information. During and after the war till now, one can answer their phone only to hear a similar type of recorded message from the IDF, usually in an Arabic spoken through a growling Hebrew.

⁶²⁶ Rose Nakad, "Excerpt," (unpublished writings, Beirut, July 2006).

Someone will go back and have another go, but they will “save as” while keeping the agreed on version untouched. The whole day focuses on this sound: on the challenge to dissect, analyse and struggle to bodily and physically produce sound so that it escapes from the confines of object and materialises as its own force. Not mimicking or describing the real sound of a suction bomb (which is impossible anyway), but reversing, stretching, and carefully distorting to make it sweep up and return the leaflets to the other side.

The “skills” of sample searching, sound wave cleaning and manipulation, and the way sound effects work differently on different types of sounds, help teach elements of frequency, pace and pitch as we produce, bypassing the introductory session on “what is sound?” And we hope that preproduction, production and postproduction will cease to recognise each other across past, present and future, which cease to mean anything when one is locked down into terror. As the session moves back and forth across the borders that hinder and scar, the imaginings that began the work are tested by material production, while postproduction is always ready to announce that the end will never be audible.

The young people in production do not seem to believe in an end. The sound is repeatedly tweaked and transformed. Nothing seems to end anyway. From nail bombs that rip open the body with thousands of razor backed nails still embedded in ancient sandstone from twenty years ago, to land mines to cluster bombs. That’s why every repeated phrase should be different every time. A real difference devoid of the homogenising psychosis of high tech bombardment: realer than the real. And careful thinking is required before making the decision to repeat or to even echo, because within the world of our sound we also hold onto the right to end it all.

...suddenly the birds are quiet. They stop their chatter and routine soaring in the dawn air when the storm of flying metal starts to blow. Are they quiet because of its steely roar, or from the incongruity of name and form? Two wings of steel and silver versus two made of feathers. A nose of wiring and steel against a beak made of song. A cargo of rockets against a grain of wheat and a straw. Their skies no longer safe, the birds stop singing and pay heed to the war.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁷ Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (California: University of California Press, 1985), 9.

The conceptualising of this sound is not to show the terror of Israeli bombardment. We don't survive the latest in precision weaponry and chemical bombardment to play show and tell. The making public of intimate emotions as a naturally assumed positive in community arts must be questioned in a wider representational context where publicising trauma and pain of suffering has not meant its end, and in fact seems to have paved the way for more. The sound is made to resist with: designed against and with other sounds and a one-shot image, to suction and sweep back thousands of nasty propaganda leaflets regularly dropped on all areas of Lebanon by Israeli attack forces in between other bombs. The sound is produced to interfere in a futile attempt to wage psychological warfare against a population under siege, but in resistance. If you watch the piece you will see that all it takes is a carefully crafted intense sweeping with a village made broom. We do not even rely on the luck of a wind, itself struggling to survive.

مباشر **Dead tv and the battle behind the static**⁶²⁸

The radio receiver guaranteed this true lie...the listener would sometimes leave the needle on a jammed wave-length or one that simply produced static, and would announce that the voice of the combatants was here. For an hour the room would be filled with the piercing, excruciating din of the jamming. Behind each modulation, each active crackling, the Algerian would imagine not only words, but concrete battles...⁶²⁹

The technology becomes what people make and mould with resistant imaginations, a becoming technique. The crackle of attack and sabotage leaves colonialism behind, becoming a smooth space of possibility.⁶³⁰ Like a stretch of wall eyed from a passing train by a conscious graffiti artist, or the final punch in the reverb of a child singing as she passes the window of a local hip hop artist always listening from inside, or two whole days from morning till night in each village, to transform colonial static of mass devastation into poetry made with image and sound.

⁶²⁸ StudioCamps, مباشر *Dead tv*, Audiovisual poetry, 1:20, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKHTHslaEKw> (accessed July 25, 2016).

⁶²⁹ Frantz Fanon, "This is the Voice of Algeria," in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 87-88.

⁶³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 364-71 and 379.

Flashes of another kind of modulation or “active crackle” appear as image static in *Dead TV*. Black moving static, breathing with other ways to make sense out of the disease of colonial common sense: a static that is pause holding breath, trying to smash through the siege that stress drops onto the chest and trauma barricades around the head. In *Dead TV*, the black moving static is intentionally crafted and works to interrupt a bombardment of propaganda long enough for other resistance narratives to begin to form. The moving static is intercut between flashes of the opposite kind. Obscene still images of children laughing and signing missiles with love: sending them to Lebanese children with promises to liberate them from the terrorists.⁶³¹

The images were released to the media by the Israelis during the war as evidence of their good will to liberate Lebanese and Palestinians from their own right to resist, or even to exist. After an intense morning of discussion about different events and aspects of the war, the images were chosen by the young people in the workshop in this particular village as a focus for their poetry. Like the thousands of propaganda leaflets dropped from the sky, the tactic was understood as more evidence that the enemy only possesses good will towards their own expansionism and domination. It was also discussed as a tactic of representation that backfired to some extent, while demonstrating the ignorance of a colonial mentality about those they seek to rule.⁶³²

It was established that our artwork not only engage with the reality of the war, but also directly with the war of propaganda and representation. In discussion our team actively brought to the training two conceptual points about an engagement with this representation: the desire to not allow the film to remain descriptive but to interfere in the ability of propaganda to represent its “truth;” and to make visible the connections between representation and the frenzied violence of the war. We suggested that our work needed to actively deconstruct (and denounce) lies of Zionist propaganda, while creating its own “acted truths.”⁶³³ Attack and defence in the same moment, becoming each other.

The idea was not to make counter propaganda, or to reply using the same kind of gratuitous violence and exploitation of children. People agreed the Zionists should not be allowed to determine the terms of engagement in our artwork. A strong conceptual layer in the work that

⁶³¹ Joseph Massad, “Are Palestinian Children Less Worthy?” *Al Jazeera*, May 31, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/05/201152911579533291.html> (accessed August 3, 2016).

⁶³² Gilbert Achkar and Michel Warschawski, *The 33 Day War: Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and its Consequences* (Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 66-67.

⁶³³ Fanon, “This is the Voice of Algeria,” 76.

arose out of discussion was to reveal how the psychosis of colonialism exploited the image of children. The necessity to attack propaganda had to be differentiated from an attack on children: hundreds of whom had just been killed or maimed in Lebanon and Gaza by the Israelis.

These were difficult and intense discussions amidst trauma and sadness weighing on discussion, the limits of time and the added complexity of representation and images of children. To help us facilitate, we screened and discussed past works of *ستديو المخيمات* StudioCamps as examples of short experimentation with sound and image. But many of the “original” ideas and conceptual suggestions came from “us” not “them.” This highlights a concern in community arts that ideas come from participants, and may not be a comfortable conclusion for a project committed to full creative decision making by participants from the beginning till the end.

Trainers stepped carefully with the knowledge they had of this particular village (liberated in 2000 after 22 years of occupation of the south); and most with their own trauma of loss, violence and displacement. And suggestions accepted by the group were always only beginnings. So for example the suggestion that working the land is sonic character of sound, made sense to most participants, not only because of the history of the area but also to speak against another failure of the Israelis in one of their professed aims to reoccupy a section of the south during the recent war. This was one of many “beginnings:” refined, tweaked, layered and made more detailed by the experience and knowledge of the young people as they conceptualised, recorded and edited, creating poetry driven by their subjectivities and knowledge, that could not have transpired in this way without them.

With intense discussion it was decided that the psychosis of this colonial condition be analysed and exposed in image through its revelation as existing on a different monitor, differentiated from our own camera. For sound, a narrative of working the land was chosen out of many ideas: a narrative to join the attack against propaganda, while maintaining its own specificity (in this case, primarily through rhythm and pace).

The film begins with black breathing image static which is then intercut in between images of the children. These flashes of static begin the kind of battle narratives Fanon talked about, forcing breath in between the terror of propaganda and denying the crackle of sabotage. The sound of land being ploughed is laid over and entwined into a stretch of sonic static, a kind of

frequency hiss so that working the land is not essentialised, but also possesses the ability to operate at the level of representation and propaganda. The static of sound was also discussed as a kind of pre-emption or audio flash forward to the moment when the camera pulls back to reveal the images of children happily signing missiles as existing on a monitor, and belonging to the world of representation and not the result of our camera: which broke on the first day of the workshop so that an old video camera found in somebody's house made grainy images. Low tech was not the intention, but people decided it expressed a history of past attacks.

Sound is working the field, joining with the fire that comes up from the bottom of the frame to destroy the attempt at psychological warfare. Continuing to work the land is not an act of resistance on its own. But not only does survival become resistance during carpet bombing, in *Dead TV* working the land entwines itself with the fire used to destroy propaganda, slowly and effectively. Working the fields becomes theoretical and aesthetic resistance, made by those who were meant to receive the missiles with gratitude.

Once the fire begins to burn, silence comes to express a stretch of sadness for the image of children on fire. Sound tentatively returns, dropping onto image as a thud (made with recordings of falling lemons in the orchids of the village), and intensifies into water, plants and trees that continue the necessary destruction of the image. Once propaganda is destroyed, there is a second moment of black breathing image static: another stretch of possibility out of which the camera starts to pull back, making distance between itself and propaganda.

The camera stops to reveal the location of the now empty stagnant TV monitor as propaganda, in a wider expanse of fertile land in what is now a wide shot. The land is visually empty but populated by footsteps of people returning-in-sound to the village, from left and right (training how to pan with sound). Sound holds on and repels occupation but keeps its digital quality, its static underlay, always ready to go back into battle against representation: concerned not to essentialise or romanticise the land or the village, from which many young people said they are seeking the visa out, with no interest, or dignified economic incentive to work its fields.

Narrative was created by the process, while conceptually guiding the form of the work and how it was to be produced and taught. The various techniques involved in the production of the sounds and images were trained and produced in ways that could make process become

autonomous and self determined with technology. Close ups, wide shots, cuts, fades, sound effects, pans, volume, frequency, distortion effects for sounds, distance and volume became conceptual multimedia weapons. Each sound and the way it was treated with effects and designed onto image worked at the level of content (the narrative) while also formally and rhythmically played with and over the image to help create narrative. Lifts and drops in sound, move back and forth across conceptual discussions, and back into imaginings and production.

Men's health project, one day photography workshop

The final image roughly discussed into existence⁶³⁴ is a man sitting on a top step. His head is tilted, nestled to the side and supported by his hand. One leg is straight and another bent. Somehow his body should speak stress and struggle. How? And why does he have a leg bent?

The leg is always bent, for faster escape. His back looks damaged, bent over from the lower back. How much could depend on age. Are the legs hard and tense, or does escape need flexibility, traces of softness?

Some people are starting to feel that stress is not enough. That he should look tired and thoughtful at the same time: that some kind of complexity needs to be added to make the story closer to reality and the tangled mess of thoughts and feelings that come with life. Is he trying to think them through? What kind of stress and struggle is part of his narrative: or the narrative of this moment? Where has he been? Has he taken drugs and is trying to overcome their affect on him? Has he been thrown out of somewhere? Lost his job? Has he just beaten up his wife or his sister? Does he think he could be gay?

People start to talk about running text across the image to explain the story. The facilitators ask people to step back from this idea and consider how to tell the story without directly telling the story. They offer the idea that direct or didactic joins the crowd and so far the character doesn't seem like he wants to be around any crowd. If he is thoughtful and trying to work things out, then he probably understands somehow that he needs to do his own thing. Didactic is commercial, news like, preaching, conventional, boring, spoon feeding and easily at danger of falling into stereotypes. Everyone agrees there are enough stereotypes around that make life

⁶³⁴ Perhaps granted by a prison, mental health service, multicultural service, refuge or rehabilitation centre.

difficult, both from the outside and from within the way people see and behave with themselves. It might be more interesting and enjoyable to create an image that is more complex: an image that struggles to defy every stereotype.

As discussion continues, the character becomes imagined in a way where his face is hidden but his presence is strong. Does the camera need to be close to really see him, or to feel his presence? There is also angle, light, and depth and perhaps colour to help get close in a different way. Each element of image making needs to be considered while crafting a shot; nothing is left to accident and everything must help tell the story not being told.

For now the shot remains close and angle is then considered. Is it high, or low and how does it work with the distance? He should look powerful, yes but does he deserve to be so powerful? What does power for a man actually mean? What does power mean for this man: a poor man? Who does he have power over? Most white men in television shows and films are often shot with angles that make them look powerful. Do they deserve it? These are established shots which create myths and stereotypes. Which men don't usually get represented like this? And which women suffer it all?

Some people in the workshop start to disagree. The facilitators say that being careful is necessary. Empathy with the character and his struggles is needed, but worship is dangerous. It creates a false sense of entitlement and gives a character power they haven't earned; a power that everybody else is not getting. The facilitators persist. It can also put pressure on this man. Doesn't power mean that he should have everything under control? Maybe this is part of the pressure in his life. Which angle will treat him fairly while not trying to create a bullshit hero?

Could it be a more profile angle that catches the side of the hand, scarred or wounded, holding his head? Or does he need space? Could the camera pull back to a mid shot or a wider shot that wants to try to understand him within the immediate surroundings he has chosen to rest in? If the frame is opened in this way to pull back from worshipping or suffocating, what is around him in the shot? Are the stairs wider, or are they neighboured by houses or trees or walls? Where is he? Location and elements of landscape become characters that need to be thought about too.

As one of the men takes up the position in the corner of the room, others move back with the camera, experimenting with angle, distance and grades of focus. The shot seems too flat, like a piece of paper someone says. Another has a look. It seems simple. The character looks simple or like he's stuck, or stuck on. Or just landed from somewhere and doesn't really belong. That stuff about him being thoughtful and more complex doesn't come through.

After further experimentation, the angle stops at somewhere between front on and profile and the camera is lowered. Some depth is created and a possible location starts to be discussed, becoming the steps behind the church on the corner, over which struggling trees hang, bordered on one side by a crumbling jagged wall. Some of the men know the priest, who agrees that we work on location for the afternoon.

What kind of lighting does the shot need? What should it feel like? What time of day is it in the story of this moment? The facilitators talk about conventional lighting. The way hollywood uses light to give man dominance over his location; makes human being king over nature, the rich white male human being, even if the commercial breaks preach environmental concern. And even if the men in the workshop are white males. Should the character be dominant over the trees and the section of wall in the shot: so old it seems to have come out of the ground? Some people in the workshop like this idea of authority. Others argue that a thoughtful person would know better. The character can be visible and different to the location, but still humble.

The facilitators discuss the glow of light usually playing on the forehead or hair of characters, mostly white: hardly noticeable and so normal, but with no connection to the story or reason to be there, except to make them look angelic or pure, even if they are bad. In discussion it is decided the character must belong to this place, or seem like he has found his own private spot in the neighbourhood: visible, but not dominant. And from what we feel about his history, we don't think he is an angel, so even that small glare of light coming from the side of the banister on the stairs and out of frame, is dulled. And anyway who is he? Who will play the part?

There is one hour until the sun will begin to fade and the shot is reworked with the character in a 45% profile to the camera, shot from two stairs down. The only skin visible is that of hands and his head is covered by a cap. The hand closest to the camera, holding his head, is splashed with streaks created by the shadows of the tree. Two of the men designed the tree so that different and disconnected parts are inside the frame helping to create depth and layer.

On the other side of the character's body there is light created by an old lamp from inside the church and manipulated so that soft jagged borders seem to come off the edges of the wall. They fall over the bend in his leg, following down and into the stairs. Whoever he is, or wherever he is from, his life is definitely not of privileged whiteness and the light creates moving wounds across the other hand draped over the bend.

Female guerrilla artist

Recruiting

The pamphlet pasted up at the school and community centre asked its imagined audience of young people:

Do you want to learn video?

Do you want to increase your self esteem?

Do you want to learn how to communicate?

Do you want your voice heard?

But the arts workers didn't make it or even paste it up. And the poster has completely misrepresented the kind of project they want to run. Put up by the coordinator of the community service they have been employed by. The one who didn't seem to hear anything they were saying. The pamphlet relied on standard lazy language, misrepresenting what they think and feel a community arts project should aim to do.

They know they don't want to be dragged into using the project for therapy or "youth development." They also know they want to get away from the bureaucratic language of "rights and responsibilities," expressions of worker sympathy or the layers of neoliberal dictate in the institutions that young people move through and with. They don't know exactly, but are clear that a more political way is needed; and that mirages offered in posters like this don't usually attract those young people they want to work with anyway, those right at the edge of those margins everyone keeps talking about.

The claims of the pamphlet and its veneer of knowledge⁶³⁵ have already put obstacles in the way and eaten into precious time. They decide that next time they will offer to organise the design of the pamphlet: if there needs to be one at all. And if there will be a next time. They know from experience that face to face recruiting works better and gives a chance to share ideas before the project: a kind of preproduction. It also gives them a chance to begin to listen and learn.

Thinking about people they know who live in the area or are connected to the “target group,” asking family and friends or hanging out with dedicated workers (or teachers) opens the way for preproduction: on that street corner, tin shed youth centre, fluoro infected community centre or stifling box of a classroom they say clearly to whoever is listening, that the project is for the purpose of learning how to produce a short film. They talk about image and sound and learning how to use cameras and microphones and software.

They stress that workshops need to be taken seriously and talk about the need to make a film which is different. It should be about local problems or problems that people face. But it should try to find a new way of talking about them: a way that is unique to the group who will make it. They take a deep breath and continue to whoever is still listening, and say the project is really about imagination and freedom. This means producing a film which doesn’t accept the shit of this world and life; a film which fights injustice and the situations people suffer. A film which doesn’t accept reality, but tries to change or disrupt it with imagination and many eyes (even those showing some interest) ask what the fuck are these two talking about.

They try again and say they think the project should be a space where people learn how to use technology, rather than follow its rules. And if they’re lucky the teacher standing to the side (or a sister, cousin, youth worker or drug counsellor) will agree: that art isn’t just about fun and entertainment or even getting educated. Art should be something like a strong and beautiful attack against injustice. They need to take deeper breaths, nervous and afraid that the unfamiliar and the unexplainable will confuse and make them and the project look like idiots.

The artwork has to be different: show strange stuff in what seems normal, or make visible the things that have been made invisible by systems that run on profit and greed. We can hear a description right now about the police that come around here and make people feel angry and

⁶³⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 2006), 16.

targeted. Or about the smell of rotting onion permanently in the nose after a long and boring shift that doesn't even cover basic expenses. We know that rape goes on all the time in different places against different women and children and sometimes men. We know all the shit exists.

Another wide shot of people waiting at a checkpoint can easily become a standard idea that some people's lives are just meant to be controlled and restricted. If we watch yet another scene of an anonymous poor man being dragged away by police, we are watching a scene that sneakily draws certain pictures and ideas about life and society, rich and poor.

There is a danger that we no longer ask any questions about why. How did it get this way? Is it really this way? If we always see that standard angle of a woman looking up at a man with love, then one may start to think this is a normal way to love. To wait for destiny (while developing a neck problem) and be saved by a hero who protects you. And we all know what a load of shit that story is.

In the project we won't just show injustice: we want to take away its power by taking full control of what we want say (content) and how we say it (form). Our sounds and images could try to get closer to what such experiences could actually feel like; give a sense of them in order to change the situation. How? Images can blind and sounds can stab? A camera shot consists of light, colour, distance, angle and each of them helps to create.

It doesn't matter that out of the many groups of young people they spoke with, only seven were interested enough to attend. One of them brings a friend who is trying to learn how to make music on her computer and is interested in sound, and a few others said they would help with production if needed.

And even though the young people may still find it all (and them) a bit strange, working out a time that suits everyone in the workshop is not that difficult because the workers have managed to convince the coordinator of the obvious: that working after school and on the weekends will increase access. This way they gained their own access with a key and alarm codes for the centre, and a secure room to keep the little amount of equipment in.

Watching/listening to other works

The workshops begin with art; the subject of art, what people think of art, and how it works with life. The workers want to remain honest about what they think and lead discussion into the major concern for the existence of the project: to make art together that is new and different, political and social. It comes from the group's concerns, thoughts and desires but wants to express them in a way that does not copy the methods of what is out there in the world. It does not spoon feed a message or a story. It should force people to think and question when they see and hear it and maybe challenge ourselves as we make it.

The workers have collected some experimental works to share. An excerpt from a film or maybe a short film, a section of intense experimental hip hop flow that does not follow the formula of the standard four beat bar of commercial hip hop, a short piece of sound design they are sure the young people will find weird. Resources have to be chosen carefully. They need to be experimental and struggling for justice and should also have possible appeal to people in the group. Not necessarily or only through identity (Arab film for Arab students) but through genre (hip hop and film are familiar) or overlapping social concerns. The workers want to share works that have been made invisible by the culture industry and to create social/historical context to the genre/media they are working with: while expecting some people in the group to bring their knowledge of other worlds (underground music, games, online radio or documentaries).

The workers want to generate discussion about the ability of representation to oppress. The works they have chosen fight oppression by trying to make a change from within their own souls, or ways of being. Something like a role model someone says...But the work is not to copy or mimic. It is for analysing and discussing. A kind of research for people to not so much focus on the meaning or the themes/content of the work, but to discuss from its internal production (and social) world. The workers have prepared to facilitate a discussion about the way the works break the rules to make their own realities. This is not just through the content (what is in the images, the lyrics of the track), but through the way they express the content in form.

Listen. Then take one small section of hip hop and replay. Move with the rapper down into the rapid voice-detail bursting out of the beat; creating its own beat, or its own music with the way voice moves. Consider the voice itself. What does it feel like, what is the quality or the nature of

it? It could feel kind of cheeky or watery, or angry like a scratch along a brick. Someone hears a tremble, like the fear of a little brother. Go back to the beginning and listen for the way music, design and voice express their own particular presence. How do they work with each other?

They begin again with a shot chosen from the film. Watch, then go back and focus on the shot. Break the elements down. What is the camera doing, how is the lighting working, and what does the colour feel like? Why? Choose another shot and repeat. From the inevitable responses about how the director is making meaning, the workers take discussion into how that light begins to cease meaning, or representing or symbolising, and how it expresses its own story: becomes a story on its own. How do these works create their own realities? General discussion about the pieces begins again and here the workers step back.

Local knowledge, core political idea

Discussion slides into what is going on in the real. Where/how is injustice? What are people bothered about? Somebody may talk about “too many Asians in the area,” or too many Muslims and mosques. The workers let it pass and wait for other problems to come up and see what happens. Or gently take them on and ask if someone may have been bothered by too many white invaders when Captain Cook or Christopher Columbus showed up. They ask if they really think this is the biggest problem and follow up with questions about wages and the price of living, or shitty school resources, expensive and infrequent public transport, pollution, sexual harassment, tasteless fruit and vegetables, high rent and crappy housing, drug usage or drug supply, unimaginably filthy rich people and how they get their money, violent police, F16s in the sky, surveillance cameras. The workers are not experts on any of these issues, but have an idea about what could be going on in the area or in lives.

Discussion moves through. Someone starts to talk about all the ugly tagging in the area. She says most graffiti is bullshit and people write crap and tags to show off. Someone else remembers a piece that appeared behind the supermarket last year. He describes its skill and detail and goes on to talk about graffiti as part of hip hop and a way of expression: his older brother, who is now far away in lock up used to tell him. People start to talk about graffiti as art, like poor people’s art, even if the paint is too expensive and has to be stolen sometimes. Others say graffiti is old fashioned and technology has taken over. He disagrees. Graffiti could be something you do without technology or internet, and you can use the internet to see graffiti from other countries.

The workers start to think about how to draw the wildness of discussion into ideas for the film to be produced and begin with trying to facilitate agreement on what the core idea of the film should be in relation to graffiti. They ask people to think about a core idea, something like a message? What is the political heart of the film, the point from which to denounce and activate the production of art? "...a dialogical praxis in which the teachers and learners together, in the act of analysing a dehumanizing reality, denounce it while announcing its transformation..."⁶³⁶

High rents/bad housing can be discussed into an interrogation of the concept of a right to shelter. How did shelter become profit making instead of a public (human) right? Coca cola costing less than water could become the commoditisation of natural resources or control over people's diets, or environmental damage that blocks flow (hip hop) of water and lives. Confinement of women in the home could become the way people's roles, characteristics and opportunities seem to be written for them before they are born, and used to control them.

Discussion continues and people agree to agree that the heart of the film is graffiti as an art that poor people use to take up public space they are denied (like being "moved on" at the shopping centre if you're not spending money or looked at funny when you enter a shop). Others clarify it is about graffiti with a social concern, not the shit tagged all over the area.

Deciding on a core political idea helps create a stretch of possibility that can carry the problems of people in the workshop, but is attached to the world and its systems and structures.⁶³⁷ It makes space for people to speak about the world, not just themselves. Distance creates a context for art making that removes it from the excessively personalised (privatised) tendency in community arts, and repositions people as art makers with freedom and choice to bring their personal to art making in a different way: a position of strength that also avoids the assumption that people see themselves as marginalised, a captive community waiting for art's salvation or that personal lives should be literally implanted into the art.

⁶³⁶ Freire, *Cultural Action*, 40.

⁶³⁷ Ibid, 28.

Distance could also create space for people to re/make new resistant ways to relate lives to the world - repositioned as “object” of their critique⁶³⁸ - from within the aesthetic logic of sound and image and the process of their conceptualising. Even as people talk about themselves the workers constantly connect it back out into the world and its systems and structures, while trying to draw out through discussion, possible images and sounds from personal content.

Abstracting the world away from the self, lays ground for experimentation with form to take community arts away from didactic representation. A core political idea creates a heart from which to draw concepts to aesthetically work with, but also political criteria of return against which to check production ideas.

Core political idea into narrative of image and sound

What is the narrative, the story of the work which will launch itself from this core idea, denouncing while struggling for change? Scenes and stories start to be thrown out for consideration. Some people in the group offer ideas that imitate serials and mainstream films: the rolling out of saga and drama and a million inane and unimportant events. The workers question this tendency in mainstream products: advocate that the story be simple, so that we can complicate it our own way.

They ask people to imagine single images or shots. To think in fragments for now, broken and scattered. They ask them not to worry about the final film but to begin to think with images. And to consider sounds: raw sounds that can be recorded and produced using volume, fades and effects to make them more about feelings and senses, the way the sound of a flute in that film became a scream. So far this is the most difficult part of the process.

The workers persevere with guiding people to tell their ideas as image and sound: to consider the many languages of image and sound. How does an image tell a story? Here they begin training with the camera and people begin to play with width, length, pan, tilt, focus and levels of focus, manipulation of backgrounds and foregrounds and everything in between.

⁶³⁸ Ibid, 31-32.

In between discussion continues. As people speak their image ideas, the workers ask about detail and the technical begins to become social political technique. What does the camera see and how? How does light and colour express its own feeling or sense? Who or what is the camera eye? Is it a general undifferentiated audience or a cat crouching in the corner of the location, out of frame? Can the camera be turned around and become the eye of a subject, or location? The point is for people to speak their ideas through image - not a series of events as if from a soapie or a storyboard - but what is literally happening in each image or sound. The workers are trying to move ideas into images and sounds. Languages of image and sound particular to the group, time and place start to get carved out from literal ideas and intentions.

They offer an example taken from a previous discussion about sexual harassment, offered by one of the young women as a possible focus of the film. A camera is scoping around a house trying to get in, while all the time we hear the sound of the woman's work inside that could intensify (maybe through volume, or frequency or distortion) and smash the image into dust. Weird. How can image make dust?

The workers notice that some people are not taking part in discussion. For some time they break down into smaller groups: putting the speakers together and quieter students in another group to try to even out the dialogical playing field. Or they ask people to write ideas on a paper to be thrown in a box thrown in the corner of the room out of the way. And they make sure they loiter in the breaks, available for people to come and talk in a more private space.

Two painful and difficult hours later discussion has created many shots and images. The workers ask people to try and bring some together into a narrative. They begin by drawing from ideas that have already been proposed by the group. There is a graffiti artist floating around: a kind of socially committed gangster (perhaps echoing a brother in prison).

But is it a man or woman or child? There is a long shot of a character crossing a field or a parking lot and a police siren. There is a shot that feels like the camera is trying to keep up with a hand spray painting, rather than the hand performing for camera. There is the sound of heavy footsteps, and the image of a spray paint can twisted, melting in a red fading sun.

The workers suggest the story be told in two images. Most of the group is horrified. All this talking for two images! Time is burning out. The workers suggest the narrative of a (young) political graffiti artist on the way to do an “artistic operation” in the centre of a city or town. It seems too simple. Is that the story? They ask that crafting the film begins, knowing it can be changed later if the group decides; reminding that complexity comes from the way we use form (and its detail) to make shots and sounds. The complexity comes from us and how we create, and not the story itself.

Shot one

The film will begin with a wide shot of the character walking across the field or a roof parking lot? There are young women in the group who insist she be female. Those in opposition make a counter argument that it makes no sense, that it’s not reality to make the character female. The workers resist the desire to support the argument of the young women as it becomes clear they do not need their support. The young woman opposed to tagging in the area reminds that the film is making its own type of reality. Others say there is no reason why she shouldn’t be a female and that it will make the film more interesting and different.

How could artistic decisions help express the core political idea? How does she walk across the location? What is the pace? Does the camera move with her, follow her across? Or does it remain still, so that she enters and leaves the frame on her own timing? How can the scene be imagined so that she is not the object of the camera’s eyes and is actively driving the scene, avoiding the risk of locking her out of the struggle for public space, and inside a prison-frame talked about in the first workshop?

Could the camera be considered the character of police or law? If it moves, how could it feel like the camera cannot keep up and is always trying to find her? Could it stop and start, unsure as it tries to follow? How wide is the shot? How faraway is the camera? If she is in the distance, does the camera need to get close later, to know who she is? Is it important that the film know her more intimately with the camera, or could she be kept distant and unexplainable, maybe like any other girl in a similar circumstance?

The group decides the first shot is slow and drawn out a little. She walks strong and healthy and is clearly not on drugs, and not that concerned with boys someone says. Maybe by day she helps her mother or goes to school. Perhaps she prepares the package her mother takes to her brother every month in prison, adding a flower or a spray of perfume on a letter. People start to dramatically cook up extra scenes and the workers start to panic.

She carries a basket that seems as if it could hold food. The camera is finding it hard to keep up with her zig zagging and straying. Someone says this could look like the carefree walking of an ordinary girl. That's ok another answers, because the next shot can reveal a difference. Slow walking is undercover because she knows the camera (police/law) is watching. It stops and starts, moves back, and sharply stops, as if in shock when she disappears behind a tree or wall.

What about location? What is there around the community centre, the refugee camp, the school or village? If there is no field, or parking lot, or wide street, what about a location where she can walk on a ledge, or brick fence, and the camera follows from the street below? Is a permit needed? If there are no lights or even if there is, when will the shoot happen? Just before sunset or just after sunrise? What do people know about the play of light in a chosen location? Is there a need to research the play of light before the shoot?

How will the camera move? There is no track? Only a tripod. Could the shot be taken handheld? What about a bicycle, where someone rides and another shoots: and yet another walks alongside holding him/her steady. Someone has a wheelbarrow they can bring. What is the ground on the location like? How will the idea be changed by the social/material realities of the project and the holes and bumps in the ground?

Shot two

The second shot takes from a previously discussed image of a camera trying to keep up with a hand spray painting. Someone asks if the film should show her arriving in the centre of the city or the village or the town? Others say it's obvious; not everything has to be shown. But what if she gets caught on the way? Scenes and sounds of lock up, or torture by a secret service start to be paraded across the workshop.

Some have captured the spirit of the project: a close up of stressed veins in a hand, a sound of prison bars cracking apart, scratches of skin that become screams, and a drop of water that hangs off a ledge never falling to the ground. But someone graciously notices the panic of the workers and calms the others down. They offer that the film is already expressing the threat of being caught, in the way it is using the camera. Shot one is something like surveillance, even though she is trying to outsmart it.

There are hands working the spray paint can in close up. But how close? Will the camera see her face or other parts of her body? What is the politics of this closeness? How can the film show her without violating her presence the way so many images do to women: stalking or towering over them, or carving them into close ups on body parts for no reason but to perve. How can the film avoid patronising or making her look passive, violating the core political idea and affirming the myth of a “weaker sex.” Does the camera need to see anything other than her hands for the idea to work? What about the basket? Should it be revealed that it contains the cans?

Discussion arrives at a shot which is a medium close up, angled so that it is slightly long. Again the camera cannot keep up with the hands, which are always ahead. The graffiti appears after it has been written. The camera does not catch any other part of the character (or the basket), or even her whole hand, just the edge of it moving out of the frame as the camera slowly tracks over what has just been written. What does this require in camera work? Is it possible?

Location for a close up is easier. What type of wall is needed? Is it smooth or pockmarked? What colour should it be and how does this work with the colour of the shot and spray paint? Who will act? Is there someone in the group who could do it, or a friend? Does the actor need training in using the spray paint can? Could the film cheat and work with two actors: one who has the walk needed for the first shot, and another with the skills for the second, even if it is a male.

Sound

Sound is another opportunity to tell a story, different but related to the image story. It does not decorate the picture: it helps to tell the story, while also telling its own. Someone suggests heartbeats and other commonly used sounds like footsteps, breathing. The workers ask about sounds that are less used and come with less loaded meaning and symbol? And we know she is

breathing and has heartbeats; do we need to hear them? And if we do, how could we make them different so that they tell their own story, become something other than a heartbeat? How can sound work back into the core political idea?

Somebody says we could hear the sound of her jewellery. Is she wearing bangles, with a sound that could come and go, like her presence, but only audible when she is not in the image? How loud should they be? What do they feel like? Could they be a high pitch panic that scratches the skin like a police siren, or more like a rumble from the ground? And if we hear the sound of her bangles, do they need to appear in the image? Could they show as a glint or flash of light onto the wall in shot two that never moves even as the camera moves? How can this be done?

How could the fading up or down of a sound, play with movement in image? If she is walking across, should sound move in the same direction, or the opposite? Could it sway and change with her movements in solidarity, but maybe still out of sync, keeping its particular rhythm?

Somebody suggests the sound of police sirens to help create the threat of being caught. But wouldn't this create the meaning that she does get caught? Or the siren could begin in shot one, low and sneaky, on and off. Then rise in shot two where production can choke it into destruction, leaving another idea that she has escaped. Could the hiss of a spray paint can play a role and go into sound battle with the siren?

Sound is difficult to discuss. It is more abstract and the group has less familiarity with its production potential. The workers try different activities and ask people to watch images with eyes closed, to walk around the workshop room and find the location with least echo for recording.

They ask people to try and listen differently on a street or in a location from their everyday life, and try to hear new sounds previously invisible or undetected among the sonic layers: and to listen for how they change, rise and fall, where and how do they echo or reverb? They talk about atmosphere and ask people to figure out where they could record a long stretch of minimal sound: a canvas to hold and help layer the sound design.

Someone asks if there will be recording on the shoot? Is there a boom? Is it possible to control the sonic world in the chosen location and to capture clean recording? Is it needed? Discussion leaves ideas at a rawer state than image, with a list of sounds that need to be recorded: breathing, silver bangles, police siren, heartbeat and spray paint cans in different rhythms and speeds on different surfaces, using different nozzles.

Editing

How will the shots be edited? It's difficult to go from a wide shot into a close up. A film also activates ideas in the movement from one image to the next, and not just with the images themselves. How does content and form help determine editing? What are possible image points to help move shot one to the next? The workers ask that people give careful thought about what is in the frame at the end of shot one, and at the beginning of shot two?

If the slowness of shot one ends with a paused camera as the character disappears behind a tree or a small wall, what begins shot two? Could the idea be to shock with editing, going from slow into fast movement of the hands to give speed and urgency to her work? Is this possible? How long should the camera rest at the end of shot one, and the beginning of two? And what kind of edit is it: a cut or fade? What kind of feeling or sense does a cut give and what about a fade?

Could the idea change so that the branch of the tree or a ripped poster on the wall is swaying in the wind: then cut into the swing of her hand across the wall? The group wants to test the shots and consider against each other. They rig a piece of paper blowing in the wind coming from a window and shoot from across the room, then a close up of a hand in motion.

Seven: form and technique disrupting technology

...a tactical activity, an act of guerrilla warfare in which the radio dial substitutes for the trigger.⁶³⁹

Reception as production, Fanon's radio technique

"This is the Voice of Algeria" was first published in 1959. Like the other essays in *A Dying Colonialism* it works towards the last breath of French colonialism in Algeria through analysing colonial society and its changes. Fanon conceptualises radio as a "technique," meeting with Baraka in his attempts to dislodge object and take it closer to action. As the Algerian struggle for liberation intensified, Fanon maps the movement of radio away from its status as "cold technology"⁶⁴⁰ of the coloniser, to a series of active techniques with which Algerians intervened in the reception of radio broadcasts to actively disrupt its supremacy.

Objectification

Radio was brought to Algeria during the early twentieth century under French domination, providing France to the settlers, offering all the comfort and eternal love of Paris. Radio was especially a mouthpiece for frontier expansionism, broadcasting promises to never abandon France's children who were furthering the spread of civilisation in the rural areas of Algeria on "isolated" farms and settlements. Fanon points to the precarious artificiality of settler identity, when he notes that settlers claimed it was wine and French radio keeping them pure and safeguarded against the threat of "Arabization" and its imagined savagery.⁶⁴¹

Before 1954, switching on the radio meant giving asylum to the occupier's words; it meant allowing the colonizer's language to filter into the very heart of the house, the last of the supreme bastions of the national spirit.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁹ Ian Baucom, "Frantz Fanon's Radio: Solidarity, Diaspora and the Tactics of Listening," *Contemporary Literature* 42, no. 1 (2011): 24.

⁶⁴⁰ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, trans. Loretta Slover (England: Penguin, 1975), 41.

⁶⁴¹ Frantz Fanon, "This is the Voice of Algeria," in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 71.

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, 92.

For Algerians, the radio was an intrinsic element of foreign control: both as a reality of life and the representation of that reality as a natural and righteous phenomenon. On the other side, the sociologists of the time argued that Algerians remained estranged towards the radio because a strict patrilineal structure of their society could not allow for casual family listening: and to content considered corrupt, blasphemous or antagonistic. While not denying the patrilineal and patriarchal, Fanon proceeds to disrupt this “mass of errors”⁶⁴³ for its lack of complexity and its adherence to supremacist colonial logic. He argues against a suggestion that radio programs cater to different members of the family, including warning messages to accommodate Algerian beliefs (as understood by colonialism). This suggestion seems like a precursor to multicultural (or NGO) policies calling for cultural sensitivity and awareness, while mystifying structures of race domination and encouraging stagnant notions of identity/culture.

The constantly affirmed concern with “respecting the culture of the native populations” accordingly does not signify taking into consideration the values borne by the culture...Rather, this behaviour betrays a determination to objectify, to confine, to imprison, to harden.⁶⁴⁴

The conditions of colonialism and racism construct a limited subjectivity of the colonised as stunted, imprisoned within their own traditions, limited in their “capacity building” to “develop.” Sociological suggestions for a modification in programming do nothing to dislodge radio’s role in actively propagating and reproducing colonialism. Fanon notes another attempt by capitalist multiculturalism to manipulate the status of colonial radio. As the market grew, European sellers of radio receivers began to hire Arab sales representatives - splashing colour across the structures of economic domination - and more intense marketing aimed at Algerians began. Some lower middle class Algerians became owners of receivers, but radio remained “French.”

...in a parody of education, the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate functionaries, “boys,” artisans, office clerks, and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴³ Ibid, 71.

⁶⁴⁴ Frantz Fanon, “Racism and Culture,” in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 34.

⁶⁴⁵ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 42.

Fanon re/contextualises the complexity of Algerian attitudes back into their political and colonial realities. It is impossible to know what kind of relationship/s Algerian society could establish with radio while it belongs to theft and (psychological) domination. All considerations to do with the Algerian family/culture are to be understood within the context of colonisation, increasing resistance and the changes taking place among Algerians: in their relations with each other and with radio. This is Fanon's frame of reference for understanding "technique" in Algeria.

Battle static, autonomous production of other truths

Algeria is virtually independent. The Algerians already consider themselves sovereign.⁶⁴⁶

By the late 1940s the presence of radio began to grow among Algerians who mostly tuned into Arab broadcasts, rather than colonial radio. Fanon sites a growing need to hear news of events like the 1945 uprisings in Sétif and Guelma, and the murder of 45,000 Algerians. Successful anti colonial movements also provided a new context, with radio broadcasts from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, as did the increasing volume of murmurs about the revolution's victories and its alliances across Africa and the Arab world.

As The National Liberation Front (FLN) intensified the struggle, the local colonial media constantly announced its defeat. *"Because it avowed its own uneasiness, the occupier's lie became a positive aspect of the nation's new truth."*⁶⁴⁷ At the same time, and in contradiction, Algerians observed a new fear and extremity (or strange affability) of the European in everyday life, contradicting the "truth" of Algeria as French, and their place in it.

In 1956 the FLN began to broadcast from Cairo in Arabic, Kabyle and French, continuing two processes the revolution had initiated: challenging ethnic sectarianism encouraged by colonialism and demystifying the French language as another technology that can be transformed by revolutionary sentiment.⁶⁴⁸ Algerians began to follow *The Voice of Fighting Algeria*, guided by news coming through the "Arab telephone" and FLN tracts informing them of frequencies and broadcast times. *"From one village to the next, from one shack to the next..."*⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Frantz Fanon, preface to *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 28.

⁶⁴⁷ Fanon, "This is the Voice of Algeria," 76.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid, 89-90.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, 86.

families, villagers and neighbourhoods would gather to witness the battle narratives of the resistance. Men and women, young and old huddled together in villages "...would scrutinize the radio dial waiting for the Voice of Algeria. Suddenly indifferent to the sterile, archaic modesty and...libidinous references that the announcer occasionally let drop."⁶⁵⁰

Fresh out of World War II rehearsals, the French attempted to wage another war by sabotaging FLN radio signals. As they jammed transmission, the FLN were monitoring back, switching to new frequencies. Fanon describes the way operators in gatherings of listeners searched for and tracked across different frequencies, joining the "fugitive *Voice*"⁶⁵¹ before the French caught up again. "The listener, enrolled in the battle of the waves, had to figure out the tactics of the enemy, and in an almost physical way circumvent the strategy of the adversary."⁶⁵²

Listening became intensely active, moving into production, bringing people directly into the struggle. Algerians stepped into formal aspect of radio broadcast: negotiating statics, levels of volume, the piercings of sabotage and long periods of silence, as they trekked across the radio spectrum. They became decentralised operators, while also in production of "...autonomous creation of information..."⁶⁵³ that further disrupted the truths of the coloniser and their hold over the subjectivities of the colonised. The jamming became friendly fire back onto the French, as Algerians produced their own content: writing (while declaring to each other) the missing narratives of battles, cut short by sabotage.

In making of the radio a primary means of resisting the increasingly overwhelming psychological and military pressures...Algerian society made an autonomous decision to embrace the new technique and thus tune itself in on the new signaling systems brought into being by the Revolution.⁶⁵⁴

The act of listening to the radio ceased to become a matter of passive reception or a descriptive recounting of news as "reality" while locked down under curfew or behind colonial checkpoints that defame and obstruct movement in the local area.⁶⁵⁵ "Listening in on the Revolution, the

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid, 83.

⁶⁵¹ Baucom, "Frantz Fanon's Radio," 21.

⁶⁵² Fanon, "This is the Voice of Algeria," 85.

⁶⁵³ Ibid, 86.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid, 84.

⁶⁵⁵ Gillo Pontecorvo, *La Battaglia di Algeri (The Battle of Algiers)*, Film, Casbah Film, 1966.

Algerian existed with it, made it exist.”⁶⁵⁶ The “choppy broken voice”⁶⁵⁷ of the FLN announcer met with multitudes of narratives produced by Algerians, whose autonomous creations become part of the conscious/ness arsenal of revolution. People vocally wrote their own operations of the “...grandeur of the epic being accomplished up there among the rocks and on the *djebels*.”⁶⁵⁸

The cops were speechless before him. Mouths and drums fell silent. His voice whirled, ample, then thin, broken, then warm, mellow, then crystal or shrill, and rounding off with low cavernous tones. A voice splitting with caresses...shaking with murmurs, dipping or fluttering along the frontiers of silent sound.⁶⁵⁹

Implicit in Fanon’s writings is the active presence of individual subjectivities in the term “Algerian people.” Fragments of colonial sabotage became content that was aesthetically transformed, collectively and individually as “...reverberating element of the vast network of meanings born of the liberating combat.”⁶⁶⁰ Singularities of engagement, created with an autonomy contingent on their responsibilities to the wider struggle. Fanon senses the becoming individual in the becoming collective, as the technology of radio is transformed.

The Algerian at this time had to bring his life up to the level of the Revolution...to oppose the enemy news with his own news. The ‘truth’ of the oppressor, formerly rejected as an absolute lie, was now conquered by another, an acted truth.⁶⁶¹

The factual truth of people’s narratives was not important. “Each Algerian, for his part, broadcast and transmitted the new language...of the Revolution: present ‘in the air’ in isolated pieces, but not objectively.”⁶⁶² Narratives are the creation of disruptive truths necessary to liberate Algeria and its people from 130 years of French occupation, while also being the “acted” practice of their production. They are urgent truths, actively and materially produced as the jamming static continues to reveal imminent victory: weapons used to collectively take part in the struggle, while individually, at the level of personal dignity and purpose, disrupting the intimate social lies of colonisation.

⁶⁵⁶ Fanon, “This is the Voice of Algeria,” 93.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid, 86.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid, 86.

⁶⁵⁹ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnificent*, trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (London: Granta, 1999),

107.

⁶⁶⁰ Fanon, “This is the Voice of Algeria,” 94.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁶² Ibid, 87.

Practice as self determination with technique

...there never was, with respect to the radio, a pattern of listening habits, of audience reaction. Insofar as mental processes are concerned, the technique had virtually to be invented.⁶⁶³

Fanon's description shatters reception and surrender to technology, moving them towards self determined production. Disrupting technology into technique creates the conditions for autonomy, as the perception (and reality) of being dependant or submissive to colonial cultural control diminishes. But Fanon is not only describing changing relationships between a cold technology and the sentiments of people living under its control. His essay is also the creation of "acted truths" to discursively fight with: both as part of the revolution taking place, and in his own struggle to represent and make thought and writing become material resistance.

Fanon breaks radio down into a series of cultural guerrilla techniques, with resistance as a central methodology. As Algerians formally fought across frequency, shots of narrative, and a constant changing static and counter static of jam and revolutionary flight onto the next launching ground create content transformed by the sentiment of resistance. Radio as a technology, like the object of art in this research, is understood as a series of moments, through which relations of power are aesthetically transformed, both as form and content.

That community centre, where young people walk in late and sometimes uninterested with hands permanently wrapped around a mobile phone (even when it is not in their hands), is not usually a revolutionary context. It is not (but could become) the exhilarating and transformative potential of an uprising, a protest, or even a street riot where waves of intensity, camaraderie, self education and autonomy can operate.

There is obviously a vast distance between a population in uprising and the welfare context of much community arts, even if there are continuities across problems and injustices that people may suffer. I am trying to extract from Fanon's discursive experiment, ways to conceptualise technology as a series of technique/s. To remove its coldness and ways in which it derives its

⁶⁶³ Ibid, 96.

ability to dominate production and training. Fanon's essay does not so much offer specific methods, but a frame of resistance urgency to make experiment with form (as it meets with the local), intervene in the power structures of technology and the truth-realities it helps to manufacture.

Here I will continue my reliance on the mediums I know best, of sound and image creation and in particular elements of software and hardware technology. The examples are specifically related to training in a way that struggles against "slave" mentalities to the templates, formats and samples so prevalent in hardware and software. These writings take from my working life and own "skills development." This discussion will be confined to this knowledge, but the self determined "attitude and stance" that Fanon conceptualises points to a larger field on technology and "access" or technology and power.

In order to counter balance the irreducible semblance of objectivity, an aesthetics of film would have to emphasize its inherent affinity with subjective modes of experience as well as to acknowledge the role of intentionality in both representation and construction.⁶⁶⁴

During my working life I have come to a principle that templates like automatic focus on a video camera or automatic recording levels on a sound recorder can inhibit independence, while also limiting possibilities of training. For image, working manually involves learning how to think about other elements that create focus (light, speed, distance) and adjust accordingly for each shot or change of element in a shot: stepping outside focus as defined by technology, and breaking it down into acts of observance and finetuning. This makes for potentially richer and more complex production and training, and possibilities for political/aesthetic decision making.

For example, a basic aspect of image making like depth of field can be discussed and developed as it is imagined and produced, so that hierarchies of foreground in focus and background in less focus can be challenged: both within the artwork and as a socially constructed tactic to maintain oppressive status quo in representation. In the most amazing and revolutionary films, foreground and background are always broken into many other layers so that a richer image be produced

⁶⁶⁴ Miriam B. Hansen, "Introduction Adorno: 'Transparencies on Film' (1966)," *New German Critique* 24/25 (1981-1982): 190.

that struggles to become (not describe) complexities of the real. Whether one is using a HD video camera, or telephone cameras, whether one has the actual technology to create depth or not, depth of field as a conceptual discussion point is a focus around which political engagement and artistic political decision making can take place. One may not have the technology to create depth of field in a project, but conceptualising it as a political and social technique, can still happen, while depth of field can also be created through set design and manipulation of light.

If the shot is a close up on that young man shooting a needle into his arm, the conventional image both in the culture industry and the first tendency in the group will often be to present a phallic like needle in clarity, while the skin is backgrounded, maybe out of focus, maybe not. If that moment of shot making is an opportunity for people to use form to agitate the real, then this descriptive and normalised image must be challenged. Depth of field is one point around which it can be formally reworked so that what the group thinks or what they arrive at in discussion is worked through the form.

How could the needle be cracked and destroyed and not just described as a source of misery? If that needle is a missile how could we shatter it as we shoot it. How could the distance between the needle and the skin try to become the journey of that young man to drugs, or the social and political context surrounding the condition of chronic drug usage? Is there light interfering in this distance, or shadow or pixilation? Is the out-of-focus element a representation of confusion or questioning? How could we disrupt the symbolics of light/clarity as wisdom and blurriness/shadow as confusion or backwardness, knowing that such ways of seeing the world do not make life, or stopping drugs any easier? These are not conclusions that interpret an artwork or proposals to read a final artefact. These are possible moments of breaking the object down into the production, politics and training, where form as a central weapon, helps to shatter reality and representation too, both within the artwork and the process of making it.

Focus is a template of technology: usually designed and built for white middle class contexts.⁶⁶⁵ Trusting automatic focus for black skin, or automatic recording settings for “third world” urban locations, often more sonically intense, dense and diverse in their frequency and volume range has, in my experience hardly ever lead to the best possibility for sound and image recording.

⁶⁶⁵ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 83.

Taking full control of recording levels during sound recording creates the necessity for focus and discipline as listener, and makes for a more careful and cleaner recording at its raw creation. It also helps create the conditions for one to become more familiar with the content as they record it, potentially bringing the time of editing/design/mixing closer to the time of recording. For me recording in an intensely focused way which develops familiarity with the content, means I can begin the process of inviting participants into imaginings about what could happen to our sounds during editing/design/mixing, according to the already discussed ideas for the artwork.

It means that our reliance on the software is somehow lessened because we have edited and mixed in our imagination: a process that can become enhanced by the possibilities in the software, but stays firmly under our control. The idea is to produce self determination, as the sanctioned and carved up stages of material production are consciously challenged through aspects of the facilitation and ways of training.

And when one (or many) is in control manually, it means they are more likely to hear problems in the recording as they arise, and to troubleshoot at the source rather than having to spend (precious) hours cleaning the sound later: like one of the many thin foam mattresses that fill the homes of the poor used across a window to block the cracks of sound escaping in, or the search for the quietest corner in a community centre that takes careful listening and sonic testing even before the recorder is turned on. Or for image, the deflection of a stubborn stab of white with a sheet of kitchen aluminium foil.

Some of these points are obvious in an art making context, but in the context of community arts where “fun” and “simple” in the name of “access” can easily take over, they need to be emphasised and relocated within the frame of a process that challenges the elitism of art making and its technology, while also challenging establishment community arts.

For me, some of the most amazing moments have come while working with people to record sound, again and again, and despite the protestation that “we will fix it later.” So that eventually people come to experience that zone: bodily discipline and focus of stillness and silence needed to record good, clean sound where even breathing buries itself and a natural time stretch (without software or drugs) can be experienced (in its after effect too). And I wasn’t even there

when many young people, who so often love their morning beauty sleep, woke before dawn with that reason to finally get up on the roof on their own, when the neighbourhood is still asleep and record the atmosphere needed for the film.

The recording of atmosphere is often a good starting point for sound work with people who have never worked with sound. I teach atmosphere as a “technical” requirement for good sound design: a rich base of minimal sonic stretch onto which we design. But I also teach it as a kind of anti digital and anti power necessity. Atmosphere helps us go to pauses, silences and nothingness without having to crash into the digital of the software or the left over buzz of the recorder, unless we want to as part of our concept.

Atmosphere should be originally recorded in the location of the project, or a location related to the lives of the people taking part. Unidentifiable (except perhaps to those who are local), non descriptive and non didactic inclusion of local content: so that atmosphere of the place carries the sound, while not announcing its presence, escaping surveillance and discursive welfare control and transforming itself in representation according to its own desires created and crafted by the group.

Local atmosphere doesn’t always remain at the lower layers, but is also brought up and down into the sonic fronts of the work. Because we have been listening carefully as we record, we know those places in the sound where the flutter of carrier pigeons from the next roof rises, or the last babble of water falls down a drain, or a laugh rumbles up on the left. Atmosphere carries the sound and also provides moments that assert themselves from the life of the local into the artwork, before receding until the credits: when perhaps all other sounds have been stripped back (or not) and atmosphere as location and the local, steadfast carries the film to black.

Production and training, from conceptualising to recording, and to editing/design/mixing is a rich stretch of possibilities to dissect the way a socially constructed audio and sonic world has asserted its control, in the same way that images do: standard music formula and time/timing, sound as didactic decoration denying bodily “truth” of sound wave as a physical possibility for sense making and storytelling, or a normalised high frequency twang creating “truths” about women as whingers and bitches.

Sound work is also a way to liberate from the dominance of the visual in modern life:⁶⁶⁶ an opportunity to consider sense making from a less dominant perspective. As learnt from work with colleagues/comrades, I emphasise sound as its own entity and another possibility for conceptual narrative. We teach against understanding sound as a decoration or didactic addition to image so that for example, an image of footsteps requires the sound of footsteps.

And if we decide to use footsteps, it will be for the sound's own narrative. This could create conditions to imagine another kind of walking of another time and place, outside that image or to flash forward with a sense of what could be coming. Sound is pulled away and rescued from the dominance of image and returns self determined with its own rhythm and own conceptual narrative to work in and out with image and its different points: maybe an agitated dialectic movement or a moment of peace or play. And often in our work we use sound to mend a mistake in the image. Sound can do favours for image, but needs none itself.

Music making software comes with every type of instrument sample possible. And there are libraries of sound samples available for purchase (or third world appropriation) and for free on the internet which contain millions of sounds. But I think it is important that projects commit to sourcing all sound design locally. Creating original samples brings local and everyday lives into battle with the real, transforming them within the logic of the artwork through form: this lays launching grounds for autonomous and experimental work. The idea that people record a piece of content from their own context, and then learn how to mediate and transform it with form is a powerful concept for community arts to consider. This is particularly important with sound work, where the final manifestation of sound can (and should be) very far away from its source.

The infinite illusionary promise of a sound sample library can deny the originality of place, while also taking up too much time of the project to listen and choose. The sound we can record is originally imagined and conceptualised, generated out of itself and its particularities. Sometimes when circumstances hinder the freedom of a project (dangerous to leave the workshop location or not possible to record in public spaces), I propose usage of pre-recorded samples. But this has often backfired onto the art and process. I learnt that I must also include conscious observations about how samples are usually cold, too digital and inflexible. Sometimes they are cleanly

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid, xiii and 53. Dyer discusses the dominance of realism/naturalism in film and its "introduced" flashbacks as extensions of this dominance.

recorded, but lack layers, depth and warmth. Most importantly they come from outside the local and the context of the project. Their detail, inflections, frequencies and tones seem to assert themselves over the sound design and often take more time in the effort to produce them out.

I have been involved in making and training sound for film out of one sound only, with the exception of atmosphere. This particular group decided to record one sound of glass, in particular the sound of a person walking over a bed of shredded glass. The sound sessions for that film considered the very abstract nature of sound, where a single sound can be transformed into many others very different from the origin.

The process revealed a challenge to overcome the very particular high frequency scratch of glass. It became a challenge to make bass out of shattered glass and to make warmth and depth out of a violent prominent real sound of aerial bombardment: revealing the reason why glass was chosen in the first place and disrupting a descriptive use of shattering glass as a sound that can “show” and “tell” about war. This conceptual narrative helped guide moments of production, training and artistic decision making, as the sound moved towards bass, at times playfully “watery,” shedding its shattered glass quality and bringing the people-shadows in the image out of the physical and emotional siege imposed by the Israelis during the July War of 2006.⁶⁶⁷

This example also helps introduce a discussion about the use of sound effects or plug-ins, many of which were used to transform glass into earth and to lift siege. Sound effects can transform sounds in many different ways, working on different elements of any particular sound: **pitch**, **frequency**, quantity (effects which simultaneously multiply the occurrence of the sound, or produce internal **reverberations** as the sound unfolds or **echoes** which seem to come after), static (**distortion** effects), beginnings (**attack** buttons) or **decibel** levels (**gain**), duration/time (**time stretches** or **speed**) and shape (**reverses** and **flips**).

Sound effects and plug-ins are an endless chain of supply, and often make teaching sound more difficult: in their quantity, in the different things they do and in the different ways they interact with different sounds and elements of each sound. For example a high frequency sound will respond very differently to most plug-ins than a sound which contains more bass.

⁶⁶⁷ StudioCamps, حصار *Siege*, Audiovisual Poetry, 1:06, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXcndSuWds8> (accessed July 25, 2016).

My knowledge of different sound effects and how they interact with different sounds and their elements is still limited. But I have learnt to teach them in a way that they become invisible: buried into the concept of the work, rather than allowing them to reign free as technical victories of the modern age or useless stylistic demonstrations of technology the way they do with so much mainstream sound design. When working in Lebanon I often point out the excessive mainstream use of slow motions in image and echoes in sound. And I often joke that we Arabs seem to love them, as if there isn't enough useless deadly drama in real life.

So while teaching sound effects, I tend to teach against them: and try to offer them as a tweak, or subtle transformation to sound that helps express a narrative concept, rather than a discernible effect. So that a reverberation effect can be used to highlight the plaintive wisdom-like quality in a Bedouin women's voice, rather than showing itself as a reverb, dominating her voice or giving the idea that her voice needs a reverb for its strength. The idea is to sonically create that strength, so that a reverb becomes another formal technique for self determined art making rather than a display of technology needed by that voice. I also teach sound effects as cleaning and mending tools. The endless possibilities of a graphic equaliser or a slight stretching of time could be used to repair a glitch or distortion.

The focus remains on never following the dictates of software and its conventional usage, but to understand sound effects and plug-ins as a range of production weaponry, indiscernible and undetectable (guerrilla) as they help create a resistant concept or sense or becoming: so that producing and training struggles against the fetishising of technology and the historical and social hierarchies it creates in art and culture.

Adorno, cinema and technology as capitalist tactic

Adorno's writings express intense pessimism about new technologies emerging in the first half of the twentieth century: film, the sound film, radio and the recording and printing of music. Within Frankfurt School folklore his debates with Walter Benjamin, primarily about the revolutionary potential of new technologies and media are well known. Benjamin, while recognising capitalist domination, believed that technologies of "mechanical reproduction" could demystify cultural work. Horkheimer and Adorno did not share Benjamin's optimism and their chapter "The Culture

Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” was partly in response to his ideas, but with benefit of hindsight and years of rapid developments in the usage of these technologies by the industries and corporations controlling them.

Technique is concerned with the internal organization itself, with its inner logic. In contrast...the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction and therefore always remains external to it.⁶⁶⁸

Horkheimer and Adorno believed that not only were new technologies being used to dominate ways of producing art and culture (killing art’s autonomy), but that technologies had dissolved into commodities, so that any other potential for their usage was disappearing. Film as a medium was merged into the commercial products it presented. And the formulaic repetitive beat of “light music” was usurping the very art and act of composition. Mechanical reproduction transforms into a technical nature, inherent to the form, and “...externally grafted onto the art work through mass production and the technicity.”⁶⁶⁹

Film was (is) the ultimate and central commodity of the industry, intrinsically linked to the industrial empires of American and European film making. Even though Adorno’s writings do not present an absolute rejection, “...taken together, his remarks amount to the most pitiless indictment ever drawn up against cinema...”⁶⁷⁰ For Adorno film was an example of a product that could not defeat the dictates of the technical. Music on the other hand possesses a history and “origin:” a memory of technique and “sound structure”⁶⁷¹ outside the means of its technical re/production, and therefore still possesses a (lingering) capacity for internal aesthetic development and the possibility of becoming art. But film has no memory of being crafted and created outside its technology. Technique and the technical cannot be differentiated: so that film, created by “...recording and whose primary goal is reproduction organised into an industry, appears from the start as a powerful instrument of domination, propaganda and falsification.”⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2005), 101.

⁶⁶⁹ Thomas Andrae, “Adorno on Film and Mass Culture: The Culture Industry Reconsidered,” *Jump Cut* 20 (1979), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC20folder/AdornoMassCult.html>, (accessed July 25, 2016).

⁶⁷⁰ Nicole Brenez, “T.W. Adorno: Cinema in Spite of Itself,” *Cultural Studies Review* 13 (2007): 71.

⁶⁷¹ Theodor W. Adorno, “Transparencies on Film,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2005), 180.

⁶⁷² Brenez, “T.W. Adorno: Cinema,” 70.

For Adorno, film was a means to describe, reproduce and recount capitalist life, collapsing culture and life into each other as hegemonic tactic over all parts of existence. Film is doomed to constant reproduction of the real and of itself, unable to escape a corrupt mimesis central to its technology. Again, Adorno sees this in opposition to autonomous art, which uses mimesis as an internal strategy to negatively mediate its inevitable attachment to the social.

...film denies its audience any dimension in which they might roam freely in imagination...contained by the film's framework but unsupervised by its precise actualities...The products themselves...cripple those faculties through their objective makeup. They are so constructed that their adequate comprehension requires a quick, observant, knowledgeable cast of mind but positively debars the spectator from thinking, if he is not to miss the fleeting facts.⁶⁷³

The major aspect of the technical that Adorno addresses is that of montage. Defeated by its adherence to schematic formula, the very moving nature of images creates a harmonious totality of plot and action presenting illusions as objective facts.⁶⁷⁴ "For only the universal victory of the rhythm of mechanical production and reproduction promises that nothing will change, that nothing suitable will emerge."⁶⁷⁵ Motion puts into effect the opposite of itself, fixing as inevitable what has been historically and socially manufactured.

For example, the movement of shots mystifies class relations, alluding to the possibility of social mobility while at the same time it "...allows the rigidity of the economic order itself to be forgotten."⁶⁷⁶ The moving from scene to scene, or shot to shot may feel intimate and supple in the way it facilitates salvation or in/justice of any given plot. But in fact this is how it moves further away from exposing harsh realities (even while describing them in content), and capitalist mutations of art and culture. "The images are seized but not contemplated. The film reel draws the eye along...turns the page with the gentle jolt of every scene change."⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 100.

⁶⁷⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 143.

⁶⁷⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 106-07.

⁶⁷⁶ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 194.

⁶⁷⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2005), 93.

Jolting (gentle or not) makes promises, while perpetuating a sameness of what is on the screen or coming through the ear. It presents every action as event to keep the “captive consumer”⁶⁷⁸ busy with false promises of happenings, diverted from questioning “truth” legitimacy of content and form and their non/relation to life. This point is clear when one considers the mass majority of shots in commercial (and non commercial) films. They exist to “show and tell” the most numbingly routine: the door opens, the gun is taken out, the man’s face is bleeding and her smile says she loves him or maybe hates him. They exist to fill time and space, and to let it all pass in the mundane. This is also clear in the dominance of the “establishing shot,” the first and sometimes only shot many of my (university) students of cinema could design when they brought me their film scripts. This objective and determined destiny can be decorated with costumes, music or special effects, which further strengthen its authority.

The cinema, with its collective mode of reception, as well as the necessity of cooperation in production, also seems to preclude aesthetic realisation of individual intention as a liberating act of negativity, both in the structure of the work itself and in the constitution of its viewing subject. For Adorno, industry products and film in particular invoke a fraudulent collectivism in reception. “As the eye is carried along, it joins the current of all those who are responding to the same appeal.”⁶⁷⁹ Film’s constantly moving quality means there is no chance for people to watch or understand things in their own way, as there is with music and literature. While claiming to unite (Universal Pictures), film engenders uniformity, evoking the fascistic. Hence the frequent referrals to parades and a militarised feel of industry products, not only in Nazi films but in the films of the “free” world which continued the parade with a false humanism. Film reveals market collectivism, where even the phrase “things must change” is a “...pseudo-revolutionary blurring...conveyed by the gesture of banging one’s fist on the table.”⁶⁸⁰

The promise of individuation or difference (the non objective) is part of the illusionary repertoire of characters and the events they bring about: “the myth of personification and platitudes about ‘humanity’ as a crude material resource.”⁶⁸¹ Just as he argued in the essay *Commitment*, even using characters/characterisation to illustrate the ills of the world degenerates into a false individualism that masks social and historical struggles of the individual. “In so far as a film only

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid, 81.

⁶⁷⁹ Adorno, “Transparencies,” 183.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, 183.

⁶⁸¹ Adorno, “The Schema,” 81.

recounts the fate of an individual, even if maintaining the most extreme critical awareness, it already succumbs to ideology.”⁶⁸² Attempts to use characters to be critical of systems and their effect on individual lives is precluded by the objective falseness of the schematic and degenerate into privatisation, reducing critical issues away from wider forces, while falsely emphasising content as a location of radical intent.

“The culture industry makes use of legendary criminals and asocial personalities in order to eradicate tendencies to revolt and to empty the tragic of all meaning.”⁶⁸³ This is a solid and continuous strategy used by commercial and non commercial films. The difficulty of overcoming the formula and accidentally reproducing the same hegemonic trajectory in the spirit of “reconciliation” or government “harmony” or “keeping the young people happy!” could be the reason why I generally resist the often automatic young male suggestion to make an action or gangster film, or the more sensitive and critical suggestion of a good guy film where the hero is not white and is good and pure to the women in his life. I have not worked out how to facilitate in a way that subverts the hold of the character/people formula (on myself included).

Despite all the progress in the techniques of representation, all the rules and specialties, all the gesticulating bustle, the bread on which the culture industry feeds humanity, remains the stone of stereotype.⁶⁸⁴

The limits of Adorno’s technique for film

“Transparencies on Film,” was an attempt by Adorno to release film from its technical and industrial subjugation. Written in 1966 during the last few years of his life (“conversing with an earlier self”⁶⁸⁵), the essay encourages “...a reading against the grain of Adorno's writings on film and mass culture.”⁶⁸⁶ Written with a more activist spirit, it looks for ways that film could escape dominance of the technical “...as a field of possibilities both practical and theoretical.”⁶⁸⁷ Adorno maintains his opposition to the realist aesthetic as positively affirming “...the phenomenal

⁶⁸² Ibid, 65.

⁶⁸³ Brenez, “T.W. Adorno: Cinema,” 72.

⁶⁸⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 119.

⁶⁸⁵ Hansen, “Introduction Adorno,” 189.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid, 186.

⁶⁸⁷ Brenez, “T.W. Adorno: Cinema,” 75.

surface of society.”⁶⁸⁸ But drawing on particular avant-garde European films and theorists, and exchanging “...a paralyzing totality for a more particular, even partial angle,”⁶⁸⁹ he considers techniques for cinema that could stand against commercial film’s technical semblance.

The “static” character of certain avant-garde films, where movement is present but through technique “provocatively denied” creates a tension and negativity: “Uncinematic” statism gives Antonioni’s *La Notte* “...the power to express, as if with hollow eyes, the emptiness of time.”⁶⁹⁰ Adorno doesn’t move closer to how the intricacies of Antonioni’s technique transforms cinema into hollow eyes and empties time, as the image ceases to falsely depict and becomes a “...subjective mode of experience.”⁶⁹¹ Adorno also considers a montage technique where images are left alone without interpretation through construction: a kind of stream of consciousness that could help re/create a new subjectivity, without the intentionally technical and content driven (false) subjective insight that film is locked into. He vaguely refers to a non schematic montage, where images are “set off” against each other and “...do not merge into one another in a continuous flow,”⁶⁹² bringing films closer to literature in the ability to express discontinuity.

As one reads, Adorno’s limitations in theorising the way technique can work against technology become clear.⁶⁹³ While he “...grants cinematic technique the status of aesthetic material,”⁶⁹⁴ when he becomes “particular” and attempts to enter into the details of possible techniques, his discussions are thinner and less complex than his wider aesthetic/cultural theorising,⁶⁹⁵ offering a limited dialectical antidote to his previous arguments and attempt to move film towards autonomous art. Adorno does not consider techniques of light, depth, colour, distance and angle,⁶⁹⁶ and indeed the way they can be made to play on or affect movement and montage. The essential element of time, marking film’s difference to the photography he often evoked, is also not thoroughly considered within discussions of movement, apart from the technique of statism.

⁶⁸⁸ Adorno, “Transparencies,” 182.

⁶⁸⁹ Hansen, “Introduction Adorno,” 187.

⁶⁹⁰ Adorno, “Transparencies,” 180.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, 180.

⁶⁹² Ibid, 180.

⁶⁹³ Thomas Andrae, “Adorno on Film.”

⁶⁹⁴ Hansen, “Introduction Adorno,” 190.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid, 193.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid, 189.

The question of whether cinema, as a medium largely dominated by huge capitalist interests and methods could become art in its movement away from technical depiction and standardisation was obviously legitimate in Adorno's time. The question now is even more urgent and difficult within the current almost psychotic proliferation of image, where it seems all experimentation or all possibilities of "technique" that can transform technology have been incorporated by the industry (after their release by the military), and still nastily globalised, packaged and marketed in the way Horkheimer and Adorno described. The presence of the internet, social media and cheaper digital technology, often discussed as evidence of increased freedom of production and reception, have not necessarily lead to new forms and techniques of production.

Low tech (as collective) production

In 1956, tracts were distributed announcing the establishment of the *Voice of Fighting Algeria*, times of broadcasts and frequency locations. In less than twenty days the entire stock of radios in Algeria was bought.⁶⁹⁷ Trade in used sets then began among Algerians in their market places, until the French began to limit their sale and control, as they did with all media. And in areas where there was limited or no electricity supply, Fanon describes the way battery operated radio receivers appeared, with thousands also being sold in a few weeks.⁶⁹⁸ "The Algerian, in fact, gives the impression of finding short cuts and of achieving the most modern forms of news-communication without passing through the intermediary stages."⁶⁹⁹ Using various techniques Algerians created makeshift radio receivers, powered by various energy sources, troubleshooting and almost building the technology of revolution from scratch (and from joy!).

In "Transparencies on Film" Adorno discusses a "poverty of means." In contrast to his demand that autonomous art stay up to date with technical developments in its medium, Adorno alludes that the opposite may assist aesthetic development in cinema, especially in opposition to the kind of gratuitousness of industry effects and its slickness and technological perfection. This point also calls back to Horkheimer and Adorno's writings about "style" as phenomena of the industry to mystify and distort rather than possessing aesthetic integrity.

⁶⁹⁷ Fanon, "This is the Voice of Algeria," 82.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, 83.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, 83.

These are points that have emerged in my suggestions for community arts, expressed as “low tech.” The struggle to not allow imagination to be harnessed, dictated or influenced by technological capacity and resources is something I have become aware of in my working life. The type of process I have theorised embraces low tech: as a means to liberate from attachment to funding/grants and as a means to refocus on ideas, concepts and experimentation with form (series of techniques) as opposed to technology being used. Like many other community artists, I actively believe that projects need to find ways to resource the peoples they work with (especially for after the project: and to look for the funding to do so), but I want to disassociate technology from the possibilities of image and sound creation, which needs to be dependent on ideas that are crafted within a context of aesthetic resistant experiment.

The latest and most up to date, slick and funded studios do not produce the best work. High tech can often mean complacency and a slave like mentality to the new shining and bright equipment. Not to mention the dictate to serve and protect it: insure, register, store it away and then come up with “access strategies” that can easily suit structures of control. I have witnessed and been involved in projects that established resources (sound and image production and recording studios), which quickly became NGO museums (private property) after their democratic beginnings and grand language of funding applications: controlled and professionalised by organisations in the name of preservation, safety and even equality.

I also want to disassociate “low tech” from an idea widely prevalent in community arts, that the process of making technical mistakes, of being “low quality” is acceptable as long as participants are engaged in the process. Perfection, thoroughness and commitment to detail are always needed on the battleground. Working life has left me with a feeling, not theorised as yet (and with a danger of stereotyping or romanticising), that sometimes the more the poverty, the more brilliant and thorough ideas can become as they get crafted out of nothing. This research imagines that low tech projects, even hovering around or under the poverty line have the capacity to create the best works: process operating with no illusions of access or democracy.

The liberated film would have to wrest its *a priori* collectivity from the mechanisms of unconscious and irrational influence...in the service of emancipatory intentions.⁷⁰⁰

⁷⁰⁰ Adorno, “Transparencies,” 182-83.

Shooting a film with the light of fire kept alive by twigs and sticks generously collected by some of the children of the refugee camp (who were not officially in the workshop):⁷⁰¹ because there was no electricity and the ten amp generator carried up the stairs in 40 degree heat had stopped working. The light of fire becomes an accidental character in the film, inscribing it with its intensity. Like Baraka's lightning crossing the divide between the object of art and the process of its making, "...lightening is curiously apt, since in its natural form, it is a process, a happening, as well as an artefact."⁷⁰²

Or the physical commitment as conceptual activity of a particular group of people engineering a "crane" with a huge barrel and pole: operated by eight people working in teams and from which the camera was hung and operated by three more people. Moving up from reddish ground, under furious sun and onto the suffering wideness of the village square,⁷⁰³ where technology is forced to become the ally of aesthetic resistance and homemade, collective techniques live in the trembling of the shot.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰¹ StudioCamps, لن أرمش *Without Blinking*, Short Film, 5:40, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFopsD8bzFw> (accessed July 25, 2016).

⁷⁰² Amiri Baraka, "Hunting is Not Those Heads on the Wall," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 201.

⁷⁰³ A village square in a southern Lebanese village destroyed in 5 minutes. People understood the attack as historical retaliation for the secular leftist resistance that came out of this village in the earlier years of Zionist occupation, beginning in 1978.

⁷⁰⁴ StudioCamps, ميركافا *Merkava 5*, Audiovisual Poetry, 1:02, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNiCe_xpkWg (accessed July 25, 2016).

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Community arts, community development and pedagogy

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