

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Practices of Fluid Authority:
Participatory Art and Creative Audience Engagement

by

Richard Smolinski

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ART

CALGARY, ALBERTA

DECEMBER 2011

© Richard Smolinski 2011



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

The author of this thesis has granted the University of Calgary a non-exclusive license to reproduce and distribute copies of this thesis to users of the University of Calgary Archives.

Copyright remains with the author.

Theses and dissertations available in the University of Calgary Institutional Repository are solely for the purpose of private study and research. They may not be copied or reproduced, except as permitted by copyright laws, without written authority of the copyright owner. Any commercial use or re-publication is strictly prohibited.

The original Partial Copyright License attesting to these terms and signed by the author of this thesis may be found in the original print version of the thesis, held by the University of Calgary Archives.

Please contact the University of Calgary Archives for further information:

E-mail: uarc@ucalgary.ca

Telephone: (403) 220-7271

Website: <http://archives.ucalgary.ca>

Abstract

“Practices of Fluid Authority” is a creative and scholarly research project examining a range of participatory art practices to locate works that invite audiences to experience creativity and practice authorship. Whereas contemporary discussions of participation and audience engagement often occur in the shadow of Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics and assume that participation is a means for fostering greater conviviality, sociability and democratic engagement, Fluid Authority suggests that participation may be a means to de-mystify the creative process and blur the stable distinctions between artists and audiences. Reflecting upon art history, art theory and contemporary creative practice, the thesis incorporates case studies that illustrate that Fluid Authority is a recuperative art form that revisits and reconstitutes past works as the “medium” for audiences to experience creative engagement.

To understand how such participatory art practices function, the “legacy” of Allan Kaprow is introduced. While Kaprow was not specifically interested in introducing his audiences to creativity, his early works established a series of situations that invited audience participation and offered creative experiences to those that executed his works. To understand how his and other past artworks might be available for re-use, the thesis also introduces the idea of recuperative art practice. While recuperation is important to Fluid Authority, the thesis examines a range of overlapping and conflicting motivations that are evident in the practice, including the desire to preserve works that are difficult to archive and the hope to re-animate the criticality of past works.

By looking to such examples as David Khang's "citational" performance practice, *The Patch Project* organized by TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary and the "Community Mapping Project" *Imaginary Ordinary*, the thesis identifies a form of recuperation that views past works as retrievable material that may be utilized as a "medium" for new creative ventures. Extrapolating from these creative examples, the thesis concludes with an account of my own efforts to develop works that demonstrate Fluid Authority by revisiting and revising past creative precedents to serve as the basis for new works that facilitate the audience's participation and experience of creativity.

Acknowledgements

A very wise person once explained to someone very dear to me that books begin with pages of acknowledgements because no one writes a book by themselves. While this is not technically a “book,” the point about writing with the great assistance of others was very true throughout the preparation of this document. Additionally, the written thesis would not have been possible without all those that were involved in the many experiences that informed it. Thus, my indebtedness fills a number of pages.

First it is important to thank the members of my thesis committee and especially my co-supervisors, Dr. Penny Farfan and Prof. Paul Woodrow. Greatest thanks go to Penny for helping me to see the point that this thesis yearned to make, for her tireless efforts to introduce me to the mechanics of writing, and for keeping this project going towards its imminent conclusion. Great thanks also go to Paul for sharing his enthusiasm for ephemeral, indeterminate and contingent experiences of art and for our on-going discussions concerning creative thinking and creative engagement. Thanks as well to Dr. Brian Rusted, for introducing me to the wonderful world of Performance Studies in the PFST601 class that he conducted and for his timely feedback while I was revising the thesis, and to Dr. Jean-René Leblanc for his help finding funding at a crucial juncture of my studies.

I would like to thank all those involved in the former Performance Studies programme for developing such an excellent course of study and for inviting me to be a part of it. Thanks in this case to Dr. Susan Bennett, Dr. Doug Brown, Prof. Anne Flynn, Dr. Mary Polito, Dr. Kirsten Pullen, Prof. Gavin Semple, Dr. Florentine Strzelczyk and

three members of my thesis committee, Penny, Paul and Brian. Truly, not a day goes by when I do not regret Performance Studies' demise.

I must thank many people in the Department of Art for helping me find an alternative space to hang my hat and helping out in countless ways. They include Prof. Arthur Nishimura; technicians Rick Calkins, Nathan Tremblay and Jim Williams and former administrative assistant, Sheila Harland. As well, a warm hug of thanks to both Samira Jaffer, a tireless worker for good in the Department of Art, and to Olga Rapczewski-Ruff, who makes the Department's Artstore a pleasure to visit. Thanks must also go to Prof. Kim Huynh and Dr. Geoffrey Simmins for their on-going support and interest in my thesis and to Dr. Robert Kelly, for our occasional debates about creativity.

As I was trying to imagine what would be possible through a combined scholarly and creative research programme, I had the great opportunity to work with Dr. Christian Bök. I must thank Christian for informing me that the technique of linguistic pastiche that I thought I had invented was known as portmanteau word-coinage and had been in existence since the Victorian era. As well, an impish and conspiratorial smirk goes to Gavin Semple for always being willing to discuss the unfathomable circumstances of academia and for finding my creative work amusing.

I would also like acknowledge my peers, such as Dave Owens, who was the other doctoral student in the Performance Studies' inaugural intake and whom I wish had been around a bit longer so that our friendly rivalry could have flourished as we worked towards our degrees. A big hug of appreciation to Melanie Bennett, who was the one that actually graduated with a Performance Studies degree, and whose creativity and enthusiasm were unceasingly impressive. She has been greatly missed since returned to

Ontario to pursue her own doctoral studies. Finally, great thanks to Eric Moschopedis, who could make a performance out of Bisquick and whose work and creative engagement have been a constant source of inspiration. His project *Imaginary Ordinary* helped to crystallize my notion of Fluid Authority and his invitation to provide the introduction to the monograph documenting that project provided a crucial opportunity to clarify my thoughts upon participatory art practices. Thanks as well to Eric for permitting me to include a revised version of that material in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Thanks as well to former MFA students Marnie Blair, Julie Boyd, Luba Diduch, Jennifer Rae Forsyth, Andrew McLaren, Shawna Reiter and D'Arcy Wilson for inviting me to edit their graduation exhibition catalogue, *Postscript: Post-scriptum* and for providing a great opportunity to work with all the writers involved in that project. Great thanks are due to Lisa Borin for her videography of *CANCELdomly CALGARious* (and for her permission to use stills from that document) and to Kristine Thoreson for documenting my work at various times and allowing me to use those images in this thesis. Thanks to Adrien Clappa for being available to lend a hand at a number of junctures these past few years, and to Jason de Haan, Wednesday Lupypchiw, Katherine Thompson and Renato Vitic for discussing CAMPER and TRUCK Gallery's *The Patch Project* in the earliest days of my interest in this research project.

A significant debt of gratitude is owed to a few individuals who were vital to the public dissemination of my thesis' creative projects: Tammy McGrath of the Ledge Gallery (Epcor Centre for the Performing Arts), and Renato Vitic and Erin Belanger (TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary). Without them, I probably would have had to perform in my garage only my cats as my only audience. The audiences that shared their

time and effort, and participated in my works, are also due a great thank you because without them I would have been a guy making up words and re-drawing the canon in the solitude of his basement.

Most of all I have to thank the love of my life and my life's partner, Linda Carreiro. She never discouraged me when I got the zany idea to try to be a "doctor" and she offered unfailing encouragement, support and enthusiasm as I worked my way through this process. She took fabulous photos throughout my time drawing the *Oxford History of Western Art* from memory and (thankfully) she even gave me permission to use them. As well, she demonstrated the greatest patience when our house was becoming a minefield of books and papers. It is with the greatest love and appreciation that I thank her for all that she has done for me and for being the best companion throughout this great adventure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Figures.....	x
Introduction: Recuperating Fluid Authority.....	1
Backstory.....	5
Method and Structure.....	10
Chapter One: Relate or Else: Participatory Art Practices in Contemporary Creative Culture.....	19
The Relational-Norm.....	22
From Relationality to Relational Aesthetics.....	26
Relational Aesthetics’ Discontents.....	32
Alternate Relationality.....	37
Dialogical Art Practice.....	40
Relate or Else.....	44
Chapter Two: Inviting Participation: The Legacy of Allan Kaprow’s Early Works.....	54
Articulating the Pollockian Legacy.....	60
This New Concrete Art.....	65
“Something to Take Place: A Happening”.....	69
A Participatory Environment.....	77
“Out” and Performance Reluctance.....	82
A Happening, for Participants Only.....	84
Performance by Order.....	86
Chapter 3: “To Reignite Civic and Cultural Activism”: Re-doing <i>18 Happening in 6 Parts</i> under Institutional Authority.....	94
The Canon and Canonicity.....	97
The Historical Avant-garde.....	99
The Delayed Comprehension and Re-enactment of the Avant-garde.....	102
Kaprow’s Recuperative Precedent.....	108
The Performa Brand: “The Real Stuff” of Recuperative Art.....	116
Fidelity to Performance Studies’ Avant-garde Legacy.....	123
The Loft in the Vitrine.....	128
Absolute Contemporaneity.....	131

Chapter Four: Repeat When Necessary: David Khang’s “Citational” and Recuperative Performance Practice.....	136
David Khang’s Citational Recuperation of the Avant-garde.....	143
Works Cited.....	147
Repeat When Necessary.....	153
 Chapter Five: On the Blurring of Artist and Audience: Recuperating Art Practices as Participatory Art Models.....	157
The Patch Project: To Bring “Art to the Public and the Public to Art.”.....	161
Accessible Media: The Workshop as Invitation to Participate.....	166
Imaginary Ordinary: Recuperating the Deer Head Café.....	177
D.I.Y. Kits: Recuperating Creativity and Community.....	185
A Capable Audience.....	188
 Chapter Six: Lead by Example: Fluid Authority as a Creative Perspective.....	192
Coinagitation.....	199
Suffragency.....	209
Perplexecution.....	222
Testing... Testing... Testing.....	229
 Conclusory.....	235
Onward.....	237
 References.....	241

List of Figures

Figure 6.1: Promotional image for <i>CANCELdomly CALGARious</i> Digital image 2009. Photo: RICHard SMOLinski.	200
Figure 6.2: Introducing the audience to portmanteau word-coingage 14 October 2009. Photo-still from video document. Photo: Lisa Borin.	206
Figure 6.3: Recollecting the “Alexander Mosiac” March 2010. Photo: Linda Carreiro.	216
Figure 6.4: Completing Image 735, “The Guggenheim Bilboa” and the performance, <i>Disambiguating</i> 30 April 2010. Photo: Linda Carreiro.....	219
Figure 6.5: The initial invitation to participate, Martin Kemp’s source text and the post-performance archive of my memory drawings. Photo: RICHard SMOLinski.....	220
Figure 6.6: <i>DISterly BitAPPOINTED</i> in situ, Calgary, Alberta. Hand-cut, inkjet printed magnetic paper. August 2010. Photo: RICHard SMOLinski.....	224
Figure 6.7: <i>Blissappearance</i> in situ, Calgary, Alberta. Hand-cut, inkjet printed magnetic paper. September 2010. Photo: RICHard SMOLinski.....	226
Figure 6.8: <i>Trace “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”</i> in exhibition with Walter Benjamin’s source text. Little Gallery, University of Calgary, November 2010. Graphite on tracing paper. Photo: Kristine Thoreson.....	231
Figure 6.9: <i>Trace “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”</i> Detail. Graphite on tracing paper. Photo: Kristine Thoreson.....	232

Introduction:

Recuperating Fluid Authority

The crowded field of performance and live art features a vast array of creative actions, interventions and provocations that are currently receiving a great deal of scholarly and critical attention. Despite the excellent work that elucidates such projects as works of art, the role of the audience within these undertakings remains under-theorized and in need of further investigation; this problem is especially acute when one hopes to understand those works that hope to engage the audience as participants. While Claire Bishop's anthology *Participation* appeared in 2006 as part of the *Documents of Contemporary Arts* series jointly published by the Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, that volume (like others in the series) culled together snippets of historical and contemporary views to suggest the general terrain of its subject. Although Bishop's anthology includes texts by critics and curators like Lars Bang Larsen, Nicolas Bourriaud, Hal Foster and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and by artists such as Thomas Hirschhorn and Rirkrit Tiravanija, it does not present an in-depth account of audience participation. Most tellingly the book signifies that "participation" has emerged, or more accurately re-emerged, as a legitimate subject of art discourse. Likewise, the survey exhibition *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (2008), curated by Rudolf Frieling and exhibited by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, suggest that the subject of participation requires serious cultural appraisal. Describing his curatorial agenda, Frieling points out that, "Though many exhibitions have included works of a collaborative or participatory nature, this project represents one of the first sustained explorations of the genealogy of participation in a museum context"

(12). Despite the attention that the anthology and the exhibition have brought to the subject, audience participation still requires extensive investigation and a large part of my research project is dedicated to this task.

To identify the mechanisms that facilitate audience engagement and the motives informing any participatory opportunity, a two-part research question was formed: “how do artists invite audiences to participate in works of art? Once the viewer accepts that offer, what is it that the artist has the participant do?” A third concern, however, soon asserted its relevance—the need to understand the position of participatory art in the field of contemporary creative culture and to determine to what ends it is employed. To complete this task my research project launches an analysis and critique of prior examples of performance art and audience integration. The study combines historical and contemporary examples and situates them within the active cultural field where previously established practices and precedent-setting works of art are not simply revered for their innovative status but invoked and re-deployed to influence the direction of creative cultural practice. Within this contested and evolving field my research revealed an implicit, but as yet unarticulated, creative tendency, one that invites the audience to become participants and experience creative practice first-hand. This creative perspective, which I have termed Fluid Authority, recuperates previously established works of art and creative practices and makes them available to audiences as a medium for creative investigation. Fluid Authority suggests that not only is the practice of creativity available to its audiences, but also that such engagement promises to expand the practice of authorship and might ultimately blur the distinct identities of artist and audience.

Fluid Authority's potential relevance is partly the result of the current creative environment. As we shall see below, participation is gaining in prominence as a creative gesture and it is one that is often evident in a host of relational, situational and dialogical art practices. The common characteristic of participation thus makes it difficult to distinguish the unique identities and determine the differing motivations that inform these separate creative perspectives. "Relational Aesthetics," defined and promoted by critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud, tends to dominate the discourse surrounding audience participation. Bourriaud claims that relational art is a "forum" within which the audience may practice "micro-utopian" situations of "conviviality and sociability." On the other end of the participatory spectrum, art historian Grant H. Kester's "Dialogical Aesthetics" illustrates how artists and audiences may collaborate to develop "concrete interventions" that result in lasting social changes and benefits. In between these two well-publicized accounts are a variety of divergent definitions and deployments of audience participation. As the underlying assumptions about participation differ quite dramatically amongst these various creative and theoretical perspectives, it is important to extricate the form of Fluid Authority from the crowded participatory art field and illustrate how it is a distinct and viable alternative to the currently more prominent examples. To define the unique perspective that Fluid Authority may have to offer, the thesis launches a detailed account of the participatory field and the way that participation is currently theorized and practiced.

One attribute that helps to distinguish Fluid Authority from other participatory art forms is the idea of recuperation. Because the opportunity for participation depends upon an already established "example," Fluid Authority is largely a *recuperative* art practice

that re-mediate and re-animate previously executed creative processes. In contrast to progressive Modernist creative practice that strove for perpetual innovation, Fluid Authority's re-visitation of previous art precedents resembles a type of renovation that creatively re-configures and re-models the already established. As these past creative practices are retrieved their metaphorical content or socio-political perspectives may enhance the audience's creative experience and suggest that past critiques may still possess viability and relevance. Contrastingly, these recuperative gestures may suggest parody in both the vernacular and the literary sense, where there may be a sense of critical ridicule directed at the recuperated work or conversely the remediation may permit an ironic distance whereby past and present may be comparatively juxtaposed (Hutcheon 5-7). While some recuperations are undertaken to preserve the past, it does not replicate established precedents; the initial instantiation and the contextually distant re-iteration blend to yield a reproduction that is past-informed, and forward-oriented. While such outcomes and benefits may occur through the act of recuperating past works they are secondary to the chief aim of Fluid Authority—to re-animate and make available past examples of creative engagement for an audience of potential participants and nascent authors.

Recuperative art practices, however, are not exclusively participatory. In the current art market there is a great deal of interest in the ways that previous art practices may be resuscitated and re-presented. Such works have often transpired squarely within the field of art and have re-iterated the traditional spectatorial/creative divide where the artist completes the work of art and the audience serves as observer and witness to this creative act. In contrast to this convention, Fluid Authority returns to past works to find models of

creative engagement that might prove accessible for participatory audiences. Instead of observing creative practice or its results, in this form the audience takes part in completing the work of art and practicing creative authorship. Whereas creative authorship is often assumed as a means to create new works of art, expand the creative field and point towards new aesthetic horizons, Fluid Authority operates squarely within the cultural field's repertoire of established practices and investigates the on-going viability of previously completed precedents. The potential benefits of such recuperative engagement may be two-fold: while the relevance of the cultural field's established precedents is renewed by being put to uses that were not necessarily part of their initial intention, through creative reconfiguration the participants may gain insight into creative practice and become a more creatively literate audience.

Backstory

My interest in Fluid Authority did not appear in a *eureka* moment; it developed cumulatively and in response to very specific concerns. These concerns, however, were not strictly scholarly; they emerged through my creative practice and initially presented themselves as “practical” challenges that required attention. As a longtime artist I had always thought of my work as directed at an audience and designed for public dissemination, yet I am mystified by the ambiguity of the relationship between the work of art and its audience. Perhaps my combined experiences as a theatre and visual artist provided me with too many contradictory impressions of what occurs within that relationship. In theatre there was often a clear distinction between those that were spectators and those *inspected*. My interest in improvisation, however, illustrated that

audiences were seldom passive and, whether yelling out suggestions at the outset of the improv or contributing a well-timed comedic jeer, often eager to participate. By contrast, my understanding of visual art's audience was even more conflicted and I am not certain that the subject was ever directly addressed at any point in my training. Rumours circulated that viewers were "attention-span-challenged" and only looked at works of art in the MoMA for between 30 and 90 seconds. Despite the anecdotal nature of such accounts, the insinuation was clear: the audience of visual art was held in some contempt, especially since the MoMA was a venue where the art was allegedly worth looking at.

The relationship between an audience and a work of art rose to prominence in my thinking as I was preparing my MFA Thesis exhibition, *Details from the Big Picture* (1999). That body of work aspired to be "history painting" but instead of recounting specific historical incidents within a temporal chain, the series' paintings and drawings attempted to depict the political machinations and power-securing stratagems that are the backstory to history. The images satirically cast Machiavellian sociopolitical maneuvering as an inevitable rags-to-riches, riches-to-gulag story featuring upstart servants, untrustworthy advisors, unsuspecting poobahs, and an opportunistic trickster hare. Instead of trying to illustrate causality or suggest the relationship of action and consequence, culpability and complicity were the pervasive milieu—blame was a thick and all-embracing blanket that shrouded one and all. The perpetual power struggles, coups d'état and purges that comprised the body of work were executed as a correlative narrative, where each image was a component of a cumulative whole. While I hoped that the series' title would help make clear the part-to-whole relationship within the body of work, unfortunately, when the work was installed in the gallery the narrative seemed

inescapably linear. The conventions of gallery exhibition, where the work is installed at a consistent viewing height, with visual “breathing space” between each image, made the series seem as if it were a collection of isolated and autonomous works. As the audience viewed the work, they seemed to focus upon each image as a separate entity, severing it from the overall narrative. Despite the repetition of characters, scenarios, and visual motifs, the works seemed like self-sufficient or stand-alone pieces, instead of scenes in a chaotic drama or chapters of some epic novel.

The exhibition’s problematic installation method, curiously, yielded two ultimately generative dilemmas. First, presenting the images as seemingly stand-alone entities immobilized the viewer and seemed to inhibit the sense of continuous temporal unfolding crucial to the work’s narrative structure. Second, the work’s spatial configuration inferred a sense of linear sequence, suggesting that an incident depicted in one image might have caused or inspired an action shown within a subsequent work. As I confronted these issues, I came to realize that I wanted to present the viewer with an opportunity for a more responsive and potentially creative form of interpretation. To achieve such a goal it seemed important to circumvent appearances of linearity and causality, and devise a method that might allow the viewer to choose the sequence of their experience. This motivation informed the execution and installation of the series *The Fraudulent Slips*. In the place of the epic-scale painting of *Details from the Big Picture*, these works tended to be intimate ink drawings. Executed upon exaggerated rectangular strips of paper, the format had a distinctly “brick”-like appearance. When producing these images, several pieces were abutted upon the studio wall and I would work upon them all simultaneously. Often my drawing marks would continue across two

or more of these adjacent surfaces. As well, material would often splatter and drip from one work to another, suggesting a continuity that defied the implied singularity and integrity of the picture plane.

This abutted and adjacent placement of the imagery was repeated in the work's exhibition. In place of the traditional single file row of images installed at some imagined eye-level, the works were presented as claustrophobic clusters that spread across the gallery walls, like some aggrieved salon. As the clusters might have as many as seven images stacked vertically and fifteen or more images running its horizontal length, these groups of images presented the viewer with a plethora of possible points of entry. While a gallery wall might have a superficial resemblance to a colossal page, the mass of images resisted Western reading practice. Instead of being able to read the works in a systematic manner, from left-to-right and top-to-bottom, the clusters did not offer an obvious place to start or terminate one's engagement with the imagery. Lacking such structural signposts, the viewer had to decide where to begin and determine how best to work through the densely packed visual presentation. As well, the close proximity of the images to each other made it difficult to focus solely upon singular works and encouraged the viewers to scan several images at once. Continuously looking back and forth, up and down, initiated an activated mode of spectatorship that engaged not only the viewers' eyes but also their bodies as they investigated the overwhelming imagery. Ambling to and fro as they associatively weaved together the works' narrative possibilities, the viewers' movements were seldom linear and telegraphed the intensity of their scrutiny. As they chose from an array of options and built a sequence of impressions, each viewer

took responsibility for the ordering of his or her individual experience, an ordering that consequently ensured the uniqueness of each viewer's interpretation of the work.

The form of spectatorial engagement provoked by *The Fraudulent Slips* began to resolve the issues of viewer immobility and narrative linearity that had compromised the efficacy of my earlier projects. This process continued through the exhibitions *EVERYMANnerism* and *Paradigmadozen* where the clusters of images morphed into a continuous tableau that encircled the viewing area. Undulating from the floor to the ceiling, the banks of images could not be taken in within a single glance—the viewer was no longer in front of the work but located in its very midst. The physical structure of the tableau further obliterated the idea of distinct points of commencement or culmination intensifying the sense of associative scanning and sequential optionality that initially emerged in the *Fraudulent Slips* clusters. Because it relentlessly dominated the viewing area, the tableau also seemed to create a temporal and spatial blur that made the imagery more dynamic, suggesting the sort of movement and unfolding of time evident in a motion picture, film or video. Unlike the predetermined and normally unalterable narrative sequence of those electronic and digital media, however, the tableau's narrative structure was indeterminate: each viewer decided how they would move through the imagery and how they would order the work's many possible permutations to arrive at their own unique reading of it.

The degree of choice evident in these works suggests my nascent interest in the viewer's creative experiences and opportunities for interactive engagement. Although this interaction remained on the register of cognitive participation and did not require the viewer to physically manipulate the work (nor allow for an actual alteration of the works

themselves), it did spur my interest in devising works that might be open for alteration and revision by their audiences. Such physicalization, however, was not intended to denigrate cognitive engagement. While I continue to consider cognitive and interpretive engagement as intrinsically participatory, my interest in blending the idea of participation with creative engagement necessitated a focus upon the audience as a physical enactor of the work of art. The tableau's indeterminate sequence of events and proliferation of possible interpretive avenues, though, did activate the viewer and did intimate a much more creative form of mental engagement, one that yielded very individual responses to the work. Perhaps this is why Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* figures so prominently in this thesis. As we shall see below, even though the work occurred as a collective experience for the audience, the distribution of the audience's points of observation throughout the performance space permitted varying degrees of access to the performance's various "happenings." This strategy radically particularized each audience member's experience of the work, an effect analogous to the individualized viewer interpretation that my tableau promoted. Below I will discuss the limitations of such a presentation strategy and how it ultimately proved problematic for Kaprow and necessitated the pursuit of alternate methods for inviting audience participation.

Method and Structure

The above past examples of my creative research illustrate the motivations informing my study of Fluid Authority. To investigate the ways that participation is invited and the audience introduced to creative practice, the thesis combines both creative and scholarly research that builds upon an awareness of historical performance art

practice. Although historical analysis is an important aspect of the thesis, much of the work examined is contemporary and, necessarily, is examined as a discourse in-progress. Because certain ideas dominate this discussion and participatory practice has been deployed to serve several functions, the thesis enters the fray to critique prevailing views of participatory art practice and argue that currently overlooked models may merit attention. As participation seems to be approaching obligatory status in both the current cultural field and broader society, it is worthwhile to understand how this requirement is forming and what sort of experiences might be accessible through participation. If participation was a panacea and promised to grant the audience the greatest possible access to creativity and overturn the ingrained hierarchical structure of the cultural field, then this participatory turn would be of great benefit. Participation and its accompanying responsibilities are yet to be adequately articulated, however, and until these factors are made clear, participation should be viewed with some ambivalence and trepidation. The case studies highlighted in the thesis were chosen to illustrate both the problematics of current participatory art practice and some potentially promising alternatives.

The first case study canvases the field of contemporary creative culture to determine the current state of participatory art practice. To understand how a once marginal practice has risen to prominence the first chapter considers the case of Relational Aesthetics and its current domination of the field of participatory art. Extensively promoted and exhibited by art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud and his followers, the theory of Relational Aesthetics promotes an implicit and open-ended form of participation designed to produce convivial social experiences. While such a goal is attractive it does not necessarily imagine the audience as a creative participant or allow

the audience to experience authorship. Unfortunately in the current milieu the relational and the participatory are erroneously assumed to be one and the same. While they share many similarities and structural features, the relational as defined by Bourriaud is not intrinsically participatory and many of the works cited to illustrate his theory in no way account for the integration of an audience. Despite this limitation, relational art practices are increasing in prominence and becoming obligatory creative gestures, a tendency that the chapter explores by paralleling it with Jon McKenzie's notion of the "liminal norm" and the need to "perform or else." Focusing upon the spread of Bourriaud's theories and preferred practices the chapter considers how relationality has become a dominant discourse and is now positioned as a topic to which critics, curators and artists must "relate," or else risk the loss of cultural legibility and legitimacy.

Turning away from relational art's current domination of participatory practice, the second case study investigates the issue of how an artist invites the audience to become participants and experience creativity. Rather than privileging contemporary creative practice and suggesting that such strategies are recent innovations, my research recuperates the historical example of a largely overlooked (but recently resurgent) figure, Allan Kaprow. Examining the prolific early period from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, when Kaprow explored the Action Collage, the Environments and the Happenings, the chapter identifies a creative perspective that acknowledged the centrality of the viewer and imagined that they might not be only a spectator but also a participant. Throughout this period Kaprow explored several methods for inviting the audience to explore participatory responsibilities. While the early Environments and Happenings demonstrated a form of implicit participation, Kaprow eventually developed works "for

participants only” and later still scored activities that could be executed by a participant in his absence—all strategies that anticipated the accessibility of Fluid Authority. It is important to remember that Kaprow did not invent the idea of participatory spectatorship, nor was he its sole protagonist. Trained as an art historian he was well aware of its historical precedents and even provided a lineage for the development of participatory art forms in a number of essays that championed the Happenings as an innovative artform.¹ Working with other Happenings artists, such as Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg and Red Grooms (and concurrent with the great artists of the Fluxus movement) Kaprow is perhaps the best exemplar of visual art’s performative turn.

Not only was Kaprow himself a participant within the development of a practice that would eventually become a cultural force, he was also one of its most persistent and perceptive commentators, adept at both chronicling and explicating the performative art practice that was then becoming known as the Happenings. As such, his was not an objective or distanced account, but a subjective and first-hand response, one written in the midst of changing histories and actually performatively operating upon then-present circumstances. Indeed, Kaprow’s twinned role of practitioner and theoretician provided a subtextual role model as I completed my thesis. Many of the methods that I identify as Fluid Authority are evident in what I call the “legacy” of Allan Kaprow, a corpus of strategies for inviting the audience to experience participatory creativity that simultaneously blur the distinct identities of artists and audiences. While the fluidity of the roles that he assigned to his collaborating audiences allowed for a great degree of adaptation and interpretation, it is doubtful that Kaprow would have embraced an idea

¹ See Kaprow’s “Happenings in the New York Scene” (16), “The Happenings are Dead: Ling Live the Happenings” (64), and “Pinpointing Happenings” (84-9).

like Fluid Authority and his death a few years ago makes it impossible to now ask for his personal response.² Regardless, his work continues to provide an array of creative templates and retrievable situations that echo through as an under-acknowledged part of the current field of participatory art practice.

Although Kaprow's legacy contains a rich reserve of creative examples, accessing and utilizing past works of art can be a problematic undertaking. Even though the recuperation of established works may be pursued with the best of intentions, such projects may reveal some very questionable assumptions. Chapter Three focuses upon the intriguing and problematic "re-doing" of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (2007) and critiques the efforts of a coterie of influential cultural institutions and participants (including an institution of higher learning, an international scholarly conference and an emerging biennial focused upon performance art) to resurrect Kaprow's famous avant-garde gesture. While the project briefly materialized a performance art gesture that had long resisted archival preservation and critical appraisal, it did so in part to re-engage the allegedly "socially conscious" activism of the historical avant-garde. While the idea of art being able to inspire a sense of communal and civic engagement is well established and the attempt to use the broad-based platforms of an international conference and a cultural festival to accomplish such a feat is fascinating, Kaprow's *18 Happenings* was rather ill-suited to serve as a model for social engagement and civic participation. Instead, the *Re-doing* seems to illustrate the curious ways that the historical avant-garde has achieved

² Considering Kaprow's unease with his own creative heritage (which I discuss in Chapter 3) and his three "The Education of the Un-Artist" articles (1970-74), it is doubtful that he would have wanted to produce "authors" through his work. In light of the eventual development of his "Activities," it is more likely that he would accept a term such as "doers."

canonical status and how a work of art's amassed prestige may be invoked by an institutions to re-iterate and re-validate entrenched positions in the cultural field. While the project was intriguing on many levels, it illustrates the pitfalls and implications of recuperative art practice.

I had the great opportunity to witness this process first hand as I attended the Performance Studies international conference where the *Re-doing* was a featured event. In addition to contributing in some small way to the meeting's amassed scholarly discourse by presenting a paper that featured my first hesitant attempts to understand a creatively engaged audience, I was also an enthusiastic member of the audience at many of the performances that were scheduled as part of the conference's proceedings. The *Re-doing* project was not the only work that attempted to revisit and revisit past creative works; the conference also hosted Fluxus member Larry Miller's *Flux-Solo* and David Khang's "citational" performance *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)*. At the time I did not realize the importance of recuperative art to the practice of Fluid Authority, but over time my experience as a spectator at a number of the conference's performances proved fundamental to my eventual recognition of how recuperation changes the dynamics of creative engagement. Instead of an exploratory and open-ended engagement that aims to produce new and innovative works, recuperative art practice subverts such a structure and utilizes pre-existing creative templates and works of art to concentrate upon concise and concrete creative issues. Because of the specificity of the motivations inspiring recuperation, Chapter Four discusses three types of recuperative art practice, one that is undertaken to preserve past works, a second that revisits past works to re-engage previously established critical lenses, and a third that sees past works as a potential

medium for new creative investigations. Predictably these three forms to some extent overlap; while the *Re-doing* of Kaprow's work illustrates preservationist recuperation the project was re-presented within a curatorial agenda that aimed to engage performance art's criticality. To more fully explore how the critical perspectives invested in past works may be re-engaged by recuperative art practice, Khang's *M. Butterfly (After Shigeo Kubota)* is examined at length. Combining references to David H. Hwang, La Monte Young and Kubota's famous *Vagina Painting*, Khang reconfigured these materials to critique the conflicted territory of gender, cultural, and sexual indeterminacy. Usurping a quintessential feminist art gesture, Khang's project points toward the latent critical power persisting within past works of art.

Khang's project provides a very good illustration of how an artist may employ past works to launch contemporary creative investigations. To examine how past works may be used as the medium for audience participation within *Fluid Authority*, Chapter Five looks at two projects presented at some distance from the elite-level centres of culture featured in the earlier chapters. The first was an initiative by TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary called *The Patch Project* that featured a series of artists that introduced audiences to their creative practices within a workshop format. The second, *Imaginary Ordinary: A Community Mapping Project*, occurred in a trio of Calgary's inner-city residential communities and was a project that re-configured previously established creative art practices as investigative methodologies designed to record the social practices of its subject communities. Unlike the open-ended and indeterminate structures of Relational Aesthetics, the participatory art projects featured in this chapter echo the forms established by Kaprow when he presented his Happenings "for

participants only.” Instead of a work of art consisting of a discrete object or image, it is re-imagined as an experiential opportunity that the audience engages with and whose participation helps to form. Within this opportunity, the featured artists recuperated their own and other artists’ previously established art practices and presented these to the audience as an accessible medium for creative exploration—as such, the artists’ works were not merely replicated and repeated but served as the departure point for the audience’s own creative exploration. By participating in these recuperated and fluid examples of art practice, the distinction between audience and artist is blurred. In such a circumstance, the field of art (once the exclusive domain of specialists and the gifted) becomes accessible to, and revitalized by, the audience.

The final chapter features my own exploration of Fluid Authority and my efforts to devise works of art that might invite the audience’s participation and facilitate experiential creativity. Informed by the examples of Kaprow, Fluxus, *The Patch Project* and *Imaginary Ordinary* I developed three main ways of demonstrating the idea of Fluid Authority: *Coinagitation*, *Suffragency* and *Perplexecution*. As you may surmise from their titles, the names of these three forms are the result of portmanteau word-coinage, a practice that I recuperated from the earlier examples provided by Lewis Carroll and James Joyce. Not only did the portmanteau provide the complex titles for these diverse ways of working, it also provided some of the works’ content. In the participatory performances of *Coinagitation*, I introduced the audience to the practice of portmanteau word-coinage and invited them to engage in the composition of collective narratives. In *Perplexecution*’s series of “micro-interventions,” the portmanteau method was employed to develop the terminology featured upon a number of publicly displayed contra-

tisements that were designed to provide unsuspecting audiences with moments of “bliss.” While the practice that I call *Suffragency* did not feature any direct use of the portmanteau, its title hints at the ideas of “suffering,” “suffrage,” and “agency” to suggest the combined right and obligation to respond to art’s historical register. Instead of any one of these ways of inviting audience participation and providing the example of creative engagement being co-extensive or synonymous with Fluid Authority, they were devised to understand the limitations and the potentiality of such an idea.

The work described in Chapter Six is by no means the definitive word upon Fluid Authority. I hope that the example of my work spurs the imagination and galvanizes other artists to invite the engagement of a participatory audience and develop additional ways to facilitate experiential creativity. Likewise, by publicly presenting the projects that sketch out its potential, undertaking the task of explicating its theoretical foundation and arguing for its possible applicability, this doctoral research project illustrates what Fluid Authority has to offer as a way of thinking about and practicing participatory art. In a cultural field where an array of critical positions and theoretical paradigms often occlude the participatory and have yet to adequately acknowledge how the audience might experience creativity and occupy the role of artist, Fluid Authority offers a divergent critical lens that might help elucidate how participation might benefit both the audience and the cultural field itself. Instead of creativity persisting as an exclusive attribute available only to the gifted and the chosen, the following pages hope to discover how creativity might be accessible to the greatest number of willing participants.

Chapter One: Relate or Else:
Participatory Art Practices
in Contemporary Creative Culture

Participatory art forms have served as an alternative to traditional creative disciplines since at least the early 1960s, but in the past two decades they have assumed a central position within the cultural field. What was formerly a marginal concern is now a staple within the global art market and widely exhibited at major institutions and international biennials. Indeed, in “A Genealogy of Participatory Art,” art historian and theorist Boris Groys notes, “A tendency toward collaborative, participatory practice is undeniably one of the main characteristics of contemporary art” (19). Participation’s growing relevance is such that Groys’s essay was included in the 2008 exhibition catalogue for *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, a curatorial project organized by Rudolf Frieling for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Describing his curatorial agenda, Frieling points out that, “Though many exhibitions have included works of a collaborative or participatory nature, this project represents one of the first sustained explorations of the genealogy of participation in a museum context” (12). While Frieling wonders about the effects of institutional attention upon “the anti-institutional stance” of many of the artists that he examined and whether the exhibition might represent “a paradigmatic shift within the traditional art context” (12), what is clear is that participatory art practices have achieved a significant purchase within cultural discourse and increasingly demand institutional attention.

While this attention may be overdue and justified, participatory art practices must not be understood to have resolved all the contradictions and shortcomings that might plague art forms that do not invite or accommodate audience participation. The range of practices associated with a participatory identity is vast, including designations such as “relational,” “situational,” “social” and “dialogical” that all, to some extent, integrate to audience participation. The roles and responsibilities offered to the audience by these differing practices vary widely and range from the open-ended and indeterminate experiences privileged by Relational Aesthetics to the collaboratively defined and cooperatively laboured towards “concrete” goals prized by Dialogical Aesthetics. While Frieling’s curatorial project acknowledges this range of activity, his apprehensions suggest that institutional attention may be uneven and favour certain forms of participation over other options. As participatory art gains in prominence it is worthwhile to consider the demands that it makes upon its audiences and whether these privileged structures expand or contract the range of possible audience experiences. Examining the nuances of the audiences’ responses is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this chapter; the chapter instead identifies the opportunities for engagement afforded by contemporary art practices and investigates the interpretive regimes that have developed to promote those opportunities that seem to be privileged. While an audience member’s decision to participate is important, first it is essential to examine the institutional mechanisms that govern the audience’s engagement and access to participatory opportunities. Frieling infers just such a situation and notes, “There are as many motivations to engage in participatory art as there are reasons to refuse. At the same time, we have no choice whether or not to participate in the larger context of society” (12). Understanding the

opportunities and disadvantages ingrained within contemporary participatory art practices may shed important light on the role and limits of participation throughout our wider culture.

Within the specific territory of the cultural field what was once exceptional is approaching the status of the obligatory. The nuances of optionality and choice are, as Frieling hints, deteriorating—the once-marginal idea of a participatory art practice is becoming a *de rigueur* creative gesture. Furthermore, as participatory art assumes a prime location within the cultural field, one particular analytical model is assuming a dominant position. Through extensive institutional interest and support, the shadow of Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics seems to eclipse all other theorizations of participatory art practice. Adopted, adapted and applied by subsequent curators, Bourriaud’s ideas are pervasive throughout the cultural field and make it difficult to identify other participatory art forms that encourage the exploration of the audience’s creative capacity. As this chapter’s title suggests, the influence of Bourriaud’s ideas are such that to discuss participatory art practice means inevitably *relating to* the dominant influence of Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics, *or else* risking one’s ability to engage in contemporary art discourse. Before we are able to identify alternative creative practices and recognize the utility of divergent creative experiences, it is important to take the temperature of the contemporary field of creative production and account for the hegemonic appearance of Relational Aesthetics.

The Relational-Norm

When this research project initially began to consider how artists invite the audience to participate and to determine what sorts of experiences occur in such engagements, the issue of Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics inevitably arose. While his desire for art to serve a social function and his efforts to provide opportunities for a number of artists to explore creative templates that presented "micro-utopian" (Bourriaud, *Relational* 31) "models of sociability" (28) are of great interest, they are by no means the only relevant application of the principles of participatory art. Yet, to discuss contemporary participatory art one seems required to deal with the large shadow that Bourriaud has cast over the subject and to confront a theoretical paradigm that to some extent serves a normative function in this field of practice. To understand what is at stake in such circumstances, it is worthwhile to consider an analogous situation, one that Performance Studies scholar and theorist Jon McKenzie termed the "liminal-norm." Initially identified in *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, the term suggests how cultural practices were increasingly required to conform to the analytical perspective of *performance* to be culturally viable and cognitively legible. Surveying the fields of organizational, technological and cultural performance, McKenzie surmised that performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth—a pervasive "*onto-historical formation of power and knowledge*" (18).³ McKenzie clarifies the notion of the "onto-historical" by pointing out that this shift is "ontological in that it entails a displacement that challenges our notion of history," even as it is "historical in that this displacement is materially inscribed" (18). As

³ McKenzie's emphasis.

such, culture's performative turn alters both perspectives and practices, modifying perception and governing behaviour through a combined challenge to perform and the implied consequences of failing to perform to expectations. To examine how this idea and its inspired actions have risen to prominence, McKenzie looks at his own field of scholarly training, Performance Studies, and its reputed area of investigation, "cultural performance." At the outset, cultural performance included such areas of investigation as ritual, theatre and drama, folklore and oral traditions, and the social presentation of the self within everyday life. Even as the nascent field was forming, though, certain performance contexts and effects took precedence. "From the happenings, rock concerts, and political demonstrations of the 1960s," McKenzie reports, "to the drag shows, raves, and Culture Wars of the 1990s, cultural performance has been theorized as a catalyst to personal and social transformation" (30). With a special interest in the transformative potential of cultural performance, Performance Studies privileges "the reascendance of efficacy over entertainment" (sic 31). Within the context of cultural performance, McKenzie suggests that one must perform or else "be socially normalized" (9).

In contrast to the homogenizing effects of mass and/or popular culture, McKenzie implies that Performance Studies gravitated towards heterogenic and alternative creative actions: "Cutting-edge practices, fringe groups and marginalized peoples, border crossings, transgressions of boundaries and limits" (50). Performance Studies' tendency to prioritize pursuits occurring in-between stable identities and definitions, and that cut across disciplinary and cognitive categories, McKenzie notes, "paradoxically...*has made liminality into something of a norm*" (50).⁴ The "liminal-norm" that McKenzie defines

⁴ McKenzie's emphasis.

prefers performances transpiring in the spaces between established disciplines and at the margins of cultural practice, and are of interest to Performance Studies because they permit “social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed” (50). For McKenzie, part of the reason for this particular focus is the result of how Performance Studies conceives its field of inquiry: as an academic paradigm it resists and challenges its own status as a field of studies through an “interdisciplinary” absorption of a broad spectrum of disciplinary models and pursuits (29-50). Following Richard Schechner’s assertion that Performance Studies “is ‘inter’—in between” (Schechner qtd. 50) normal disciplinary distinctions, McKenzie surmises that the quality of “liminality” is the distinguishing facet of the field of study. Within his broader project, where performance succeeds discipline as the organizing principle forming power and knowledge, Performance Studies’ perception of cultural performance invests its attention in liminal subjects and makes the acknowledgement of stable and concise subjects unlikely. To an extent, the “perform or else” challenge not only threatens “social normalization” but “cognitive legibility” within a knowledge regime demanding compulsory performance and seemingly uninterested in performances that do not conform to its specialized interests.

An analogous scenario seems to be forming between the broad field of participatory art and relational art in particular. The spread of participation as an art practice and value underwritten by an expanding critical discourse re-positions a seemingly marginal practice at the centre of culture and makes it a force to be reckoned with. Re-emerging in the early 1990s, the varied material, temporal and spatial manifestations of participatory art proved fertile ground for practitioners around the

globe. To account for this trend several curators and critics developed a range of theorizations and analytic tools to describe and dissect the field of participatory art. Stretching from Suzi Gablik's "Connective Aesthetics" to Suzanne Lacy's "New Genre Public Art," these theorizations noted the growing role of the audience within the work of art and how artists were re-conceiving creative experiences in relational, situational and social terms. Through this critical and creative attention, liminal participatory art soon became a core concern of contemporary art; in this shift from the margin to the centre, however, critical and curatorial interest coalesced around a drastically contracted conceptualization of participatory art that obscured the practice's potential plurality. Instead of the cultural field accommodating a wider range of socially and aesthetically informed practices, participatory art has increasingly been obscured by the idea of the "relational." Akin to the shift from the broad notion of cultural performance to the prioritization of the field's liminal subjects, the attribute "relationality" is increasingly defined via Nicolas Bourriaud's theoretical model "Relational Aesthetics" and has come stand for the whole of the field of participatory art. Influencing a subsequent wave of curators in influential positions, like some spectral avant-garde throwback, Relational Aesthetic's proponents seem to drive the direction of culture. Privileging such "biennial-circuit stalwarts" (Kester, "Another Turn" n.p.) as Thomas Hirschhorn, Santiago Sierra, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick, relational artists have gained access to opportunities to work around the world and are at the forefront of the global art era. Like the socially transformative aspects of cultural performance at the heart of McKenzie's articulation of the field of Performance Studies, relational practices are becoming the "liminal-norm" of creative culture—both as a prime topic of cultural discussion and as a creative

methodology anointed by institutional support. As it becomes institutionalized, what is at stake is both the “social normalization” of relational art, and also the “cultural marginalization” and loss of “cognitive legibility” for creative activities that fail to explicitly address relationality. If relationality is stipulated as a condition of cultural legitimacy, the pervasiveness of its influence might soon threaten to push other forms of cultural production to the margins of the cultural field, negating their validity. Understanding the “liminal-norm” of relationality requires a closer examination of its most dominant strain, Relational Aesthetics.

From Relationality to Relational Aesthetics

The theory of “Relational Aesthetics” originally coalesced within a series of articles that curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud prepared between 1995 and 1997. While organizing several exhibitions that featured such artists as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Jorge Pardo and Philippe Parreno, Bourriaud observed how contemporary art increasingly required the viewer’s physical engagement to function and seemed designed to enable the formation of social relationships. When he curated *Traffic* at CAPC (Musée D’Art Contemporain De Bordeaux) in 1996, the landmark exhibition included many of the artists that would feature largely in Bourriaud’s subsequent curatorial projects and would serve as exemplars of “relational aesthetics” (Downey n3, 268). Published in *Documents sur l’art*, a journal that Bourriaud co-edited with Eric Troncy, the articles were collected as *Esthétique relationnelle* in 1998 and subsequently translated into English as *Relational Aesthetics* in 2002. To contrast with his role as a curator, in the articles Bourriaud self-identified as a “critic” assessing relational “activity in the present”

(*Relational Aesthetics* 11). While the overlapping and (potentially) conflicting roles of curator and critical commentator (Martin 370) might suggest that Bourriaud's writings were self-validating gestures, or as Stuart Martin calls them "strategic professionalism" (370), they did not adversely affect Bourriaud's career trajectory. By 1999, Bourriaud was co-director (with Jérôme Sans) of Paris' Palais de Tokyo and more recently he was appointed Gubkenian curator of contemporary art at the Tate Modern, London and served as curator of the 2009 Tate Triennial *Altermodern*.

While it is often thought of as a comprehensive theory, Relational Aesthetics' genesis as a series of articles is evident throughout the book. Instead of offering a more clearly delineated analytical system, Bourriaud somewhat distances himself from this expectation by stipulating that, "Relational aesthetics does not represent a theory of art...but a theory of form" (*Relational*, 19). By locating art forms or "formations" (21) that demonstrate and enable such values as "conviviality" and "sociability," Relational Aesthetics conceives of art "as a form of social exchange" (Martin 376). As an aesthetic system, Bourriaud claims, Relational Aesthetics examines "the coherence of [the] form, and then the symbolic value of the 'world' it suggests to us, and of the human relationships reflected by it" (*Relational*, 18). This relational "activity" that facilitates conviviality and sociability arises within a context where urbanization, globalization and advances in telecommunications alienate human relationships and sever social bonds (8-9). Increasingly isolated from one another, individuals become merely the "consumers of time and space" (9). Pointing towards Guy Debord, Bourriaud claims that life is no longer "directly experienced," but blurs with its "spectacular" representation (9). Contrasting these contextual concerns, Bourriaud identifies a form of art that does not

represent relationships (thus perpetuating Debord's concern), but instead offers opportunities to directly experience relationships within "hands-on utopias" (9). While such claims seem to possess a revolutionary resonance, Bourriaud distinguishes this relational artwork from the utopian revolutionary programs of the historical avant-garde (12). Instead of "Utopia" emblazoned upon a standard carried at the forefront of culture by those heading towards some dimly sighted future, Bourriaud's conception of relational art practices revises "Utopia" as "micro-utopia," (31) and adds this annotation upon the margin of the script of the *now*. Reminding his readers of Lyotard's contention that the post-modern could only offer "minor modifications" (Lyotard qtd. in Bourriaud *Relational*, 13) to the world inherited from modernity, Bourriaud stresses the potential benefits of such a state as it presents contemporary artists with the "chance" to learn "*to inhabit the world in a better way*" (13).⁵ "[T]he role of the artist," for Bourriaud, was "no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real" (sic 13). As such, relational art eschews widespread change and systematic innovation for incremental revision and renovation. Its project situates "micro-utopias" in the *present*, and explores circumstances to assess what (temporary) improvements might be made.

In contrast to individual subjectivity that an audience member experiences when consuming a novel or a television program, relational art offers a collective spectatorial experience that Bourriaud likens to that of the theatre or cinema. Unlike such theatrical contexts, relational art practices do not mimetically reflect private or symbolic spaces, but provide "models of action within the existing real" by cultivating social situations

⁵ Bourriaud's emphasis.

(Bourriaud *Relational*, 14-15). Sharing time, space and experience permits the opportunity for discussion and social exchange. Bourriaud ranks the value of this social exchange alongside that of the work of art's economic and semantic value (16), and links it to Karl Marx's idea of the "interstice." For Marx, interstices were non-capitalist trading methods, such as the barter system, that operated alongside and between officially sanctioned forms of exchange—as such they offered alternative systems of exchange and valuation. Within Marx's example, Bourriaud finds a system analogous to the type of value that relational art provides. Offering "free arenas" of social exchange, relational art "encourages an inter-human commerce" whose example operates in contrast to the communicative exchange system "imposed upon us" (Bourriaud *Relational*, 16). Trading in experiential offerings, shared time and the opportunity for discourse, relational art resists the type of readily commoditized images and objects that dominated Modern art.⁶ But how "free" are the arenas of social exchange that Bourriaud promotes as alternatives? What sorts of relationships are valued within the social interstices where relational art practices occur? Relational practices, in Bourriaud's view, demonstrate "models of sociability" (*Relational*, 28)⁷ and while he admits that, "[a]ll works of art produce a model of sociability" (109), Bourriaud points out that traditional concrete art objects and images demonstrate a "symbolic availability....to be consumed within a 'monumental'

⁶ This contrasting temperament is one that Bourriaud claims "is the precise nature of the contemporary art exhibition in the arena of representational commerce" (16). It is worth noting that this "alternative" already has assumed the status of the "liminal-norm" and secured a place of prominence if we accept Bourriaud's blanket assertion regarding the "precise nature of the contemporary art exhibition" within the Debord-derived "arena of representational commerce."

⁷ Anthony Downey erroneously quotes and emphasizes this passage as "*new* models of sociability" (Downey 269).

time frame and be open for a universal public”(29). By contrast, relational works unfold in “factual time, for an audience *summoned by the artist*” (29).⁸ Emphasizing the specificity of the context and the intimacy of the encounter, Bourriaud likens this relational form to an appointment or a rendezvous. As the author of these relational encounters, the artist develops “convivial and user-friendly areas”(46) where the temporary connections between the artist and the summoned audience transpire. Pointing to conviviality, though, Bourriaud hints at the sort of relationships that he most values and the benefits of the connections initiated by relational practices: “Through little services rendered, the artists fill the cracks in the social bonds...through little gestures art is like an angelic programme, a set of tasks carried out beside or beneath the real economic system, so as to patiently re-stitch the relational fabric” (36). While such goals make sense within the social context of alienation and isolation, Bourriaud’s articulation of relational art’s purposes severely limits the practice’s scope and range of concerns. In place of the “free arenas” of social exchange, where alternate social practice and micro-utopian experiences might be tested, relational art as conceived by Bourriaud seems only able to offer a post-defeat emollient.

This limited view of relational art’s objectives combines with a rather meager account of the role the “summoned” audience plays within this interchange. While Bourriaud indicates that “Spectator ‘participation,’ theorized by Fluxus happenings and performance, has become a constant feature of artistic practice” (25), and that the audience’s “share of interactivity grows in volume within the set of communication vehicles” (25-6) at relational art’s disposal, he does not address the specifics of this

⁸ Bourriaud’s emphasis.

participatory interactivity or mention the possibility that such participation might be “creative.” While he is most skilled at painting precise images of idiosyncratic acts of unexpected creativity, Bourriaud’s descriptions are more evocative than explanatory. Identifying himself as a “critic” attempting to account for relational art’s “activity in the present” (11), Bourriaud often neglects to pursue the implications of the practices that catch his attention or specifically address the audience’s experience within the “model of sociability.” While Pierre Huyghe’s making a television transmitter available to the public (8) illustrates something of the “little services” that interest Bourriaud, how the audience employed this equipment and what sort of programming the participants broadcast is not addressed. As well, Bourriaud neglects to explain how Vanessa Beecroft dressing twenty or more women “in the same way, complete with a red wig” (8), for a performance that the audience only experiences by glimpsing it through an open door might “patiently re-stitch the relational fabric.” While the connection might be clear to Bourriaud, he fails to explain many of the incongruent examples that he offers as representative of this new “model of sociability.” Despite his claims that participation is central to relational art practices, *Relational Aesthetics* does not consistently account for audience participation, nor consistently promote it as an accessible attribute. While he expresses concern that participation in contemporary society is compromised because “The ‘society of the spectacle’ is thus followed by the society of the extras, where everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication” (26), Bourriaud’s disregard for participation seems to re-iterate the audience as “extras” subservient to the scenographic setting devised by the artist.

Relational Aesthetics' Discontents

Bourriaud's reluctance to articulate the participatory experience within relational art practice might be understandable considering his interest in the openness of structure and indeterminacy that is a feature of much of the work that he associates with his theory of Relational Aesthetics. As we shall see below, these indefinite and elusive structures have not inhibited Relational Aesthetics' (and the art practices that it underwrites) ascension to prominence. What art historian and theorist Anthony Downey has called "open-endedness" (273) persists as a point of contention within a number of critical commentaries. In "Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics," Downey is intrigued by Relational Aesthetics' preference for micro-utopias in the present over systematic utopian revolutions deferred to the future, but he is most concerned with Relational Aesthetics' use or utilitarian value. Substantiating just what transpires within the relational exchange between artist and audience and what benefit the participant might gain from the experience is occluded by the "open-endedness" (273) of Bourriaud's theorization. While this open-endedness allows for "a radical social inclusiveness" within the field of practice, it "produces an interpretive impasse" (273) that is counter-productive to verifying Bourriaud's claims regarding the efficacy of relational art practices. Focusing upon the limited political theorization of Bourriaud's "theory of form," Downey concludes that "it would appear that it is not so much *what is said* that interests Bourriaud in the work he promotes, as *how it is said*" (268).⁹ The political ramifications of Relational Aesthetics' open-endedness have also caught the attention of art critic and scholar Hal Foster. In "(Dis)Engaged Art," Foster observes that, "Sometimes politics are

⁹ Downey's emphasis.

ascribed to such art on the basis of the shaky analogy between an open artwork and an inclusive society, as if the desultory form might evoke a democratic community or a non-hierarchical installation predict an egalitarian world” (“(Dis)Engaged” 76).

Rhetorically, Foster also asks whether the open forums favoured by Relational Aesthetics might be “too great a burden to place on the viewer, too ambiguous a test?” (77). Juxtaposing several of the projects theorized and promoted by Bourriaud with historical examples, Foster points out that audience participation should not be assumed to be a positive attribute and that it also may re-assert the authority of the artist:

As with previous attempts to involve the audience directly (for example, in some Process and Conceptual art), there is a risk of illegibility here, which might serve to reintroduce the artist as the principle figure and the primary exegete of the work. At times, ‘the death of the author’ has not meant ‘the birth of the reader,’ as Roland Barthes famously speculated, so much as the befuddlement of the viewer. (77)

While it seems possible that “befuddlement” might inspire a discourse that disambiguates this “illegibility” and enables the formation of the social relationships that Relational Aesthetics cherishes, Foster wonders how this quality distinguishes Bourriaud’s art form: “when has art, at least since the Renaissance, not involved discursivity and sociability?” (77). While admitting that discursive and sociable characteristics might have assumed importance in Relational Aesthetics because they are disappearing from everyday life, Foster points out that the contemporary exhibition has come to “feel like remedial work in socialization” (77). Making up for societal shortcomings might be a laudable goal, but

Foster wonders if this restorative gesture is an adequate response to the problem of vanishing opportunities to take part in public discourse? Or are the participatory opportunities afforded by Relational Aesthetics impoverished compared to past examples? Foster seems to side with the former over the latter: “Art collectives in the recent past, such as those formed around AIDS activism, were political projects; today simply getting together seems to be enough” (77).

The apparent apolitical quality that Foster alludes to is also a point of contention throughout Claire Bishop’s “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.” Bishop’s article investigates Relational Aesthetics enthusiasm for “open” works of art and, like Foster, questions the validity of associating this quality with a democratic sensibility. To approach this problem Bishop moves from the theory of Relational Aesthetics to its practical application. Examining Bourriaud’s influential directorship of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Bishop notes how in place of the “white cube” at the heart of the Modernist museum, Bourriaud promoted the idea of the art institution as a “laboratory” for the exploration of contemporary art, a forum especially accommodating to the open-ended and informal art produced in the 1990s (Bishop, “Antagonism” 51-2). Often requiring interactivity and resisting formal closure, Bishop points out that “[s]uch work seems to derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the *interpretations* of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art *itself* is argued to be in perpetual flux” (52).¹⁰ As was the case for Downey, the instability of these open works creates something of an interpretive dilemma for Bishop, as she points to “the difficulty of discerning a work whose identity is willfully unstable” (52).

¹⁰ Bishop’s emphasis.

Located within the laboratory, the conceptual resolution of the work is overwhelmed by the “buzz of creativity and the aura of being on the vanguard of contemporary production” (52), a creative milieu that could inhibit the viewer’s understanding of the work. Indeed, Bishop emphasizes that “what the viewer is supposed to garner from such an ‘experience’ of creativity, which is essentially institutionalized studio activity, is often unclear” (52).

To explore how open-endedness evolved from an interpretive value to a praxical end in Bourriaud’s open laboratory model, Bishop revisits Umberto Eco. In *The Open Work*, Eco identified the “open work” as a work of art that was available for perpetual re-interpretation. Analyzing a long passage that enthusiastically re-casts the relationship between artist and audience as one where “communicative strategies” make works available for use, Bishop admits that relational artists might feel that Eco privileged interactive and experiential practice. Where Bourriaud goes astray, from Bishop’s perspective, is when he shifts openness from reception to production and postulates it as a formal criterion. While relational art practices, formally speaking, demonstrate an open-ended structure that resists interpretive closure, Bishop also points out that as a criterion such openness paradoxically becomes its own type of closure or end in itself.¹¹ Bourriaud’s problematic reading of “the open work” not only positions relational art practices’ open and interactive form as more user-friendly than traditional art forms, but for Bishop, the problem is compounded by Bourriaud’s assumption that this structure is “automatically political in implication and emancipatory in effect” (62). Bishop admits

¹¹ In note #30, Bishop points out that it “could be argued that this approach actually forecloses ‘open-ended’ readings, since the meaning of the work becomes so synonymous with the fact that its meaning is open” (62).

that Bourriaud's assumption is in-line with the late-Modernist notion that the work of art could act "as a potential trigger for participation" and that such participatory invitations were underwritten with "a rhetoric of democracy and emancipation" (61); however, like Foster, Bishop questions the inferred equivalence of participation with democracy. Bourriaud's reluctance to make qualitative differentiations among differing types of relationships and levels of dialogue is untenable for Bishop and suggests that, for Bourriaud, the aesthetic quality of "relationality" is unassailably positive and its effects are unquestionably beneficial: "The *quality* of the relationships in 'relational aesthetics' are never examined or called into question... all relations that permit 'dialogue' are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good" (Bishop "Antagonism" 65).¹²

The criticisms launched by Bishop, Foster and Downey all point towards the problematic assumptions at the heart of Relational Aesthetics: the correlation between the works' open-ended formal structure and the purported democratic potential of audience participation engendered by such structures. Privileging a single formal structure and identifying a fairly limited range of desired audience responses (sociability and conviviality), however, Relational Aesthetics seems to be neither particularly open nor democratic. Within the types of art practices privileged by Bourriaud open-endedness seems to become an end in itself and, paradoxically, fails to reflect the diversity of creative situations, audience experiences and participatory responsibilities that a democratic perspective allows us to imagine. Relational art practice's interest in exploring "ways of living and models of action within the existing real" (Bourriaud

¹² Bishop's emphasis.

Relational, 13) suggests that there is an appetite for creative experiences that might model alternative social practice and be capable of securing concrete societal changes, but to locate these examples we must look beyond the theorization of Relational Aesthetics.

Alternative Relationality

Claire Bishop's notion of "relational antagonism" attempts to fulfill this function and provide a different way of thinking of relationality. Introduced in "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" and alongside her critique of Relational Aesthetics discussed above, Bishop asserts that relational art practices "are not intrinsically democratic" (67). To locate the practice's democratic potential Bishop works in direct opposition to Bourriaud's micro-utopian ideals of sociability and conviviality and identifies Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's notion of "antagonism" as the social characteristic that enables democratic practice. Following Laclau and Mouffe, Bishop questions whether a social system where all conflicts and contentions have been erased and homogenized could be identified as "democratic." Without opportunities for meaningful debate, a false sense of consensus dominates, suffocating democratic engagement. Debate and contestation, by contrast, sustains social disagreement, difference and conflict and acts as the catalysts for social transformation within a heterogenic society (65-6). At the centre of the antagonistic process is an "irredeemably decentered and incomplete" (66) form of subjectivity derived from Lacan. In the place of coherent and autonomous identities able to self-deterministically practice "agency," this subjectivity proceeds through identifications between partial and ill-formed identities. "[T]he relationship that arises

between such incomplete entities” (66) is what Laclau and Mouffe see as “antagonism.” The relational, in this case, differentiates the self from what is not the self; as Bishop points out, “the presence of what is not me renders my identity precarious and vulnerable, and the threat that the other represents transforms my *own* sense of self into something questionable” (66). Instead of affirming or validating one’s individual subjectivity, antagonism offers the critical friction that resists the constitution of a stable and coherent sense of self. Extended to the social level antagonism limits “society’s ability to fully constitute itself” (66), so that it remains a dynamic system open to revision and contestation.

Antagonism, then, is offered as an alternative model where “decentered and incomplete” subjects are brought into contact with one another, and the differences between these subjectivities spur the friction and debate that drives democratic participation. While Bourriaud’s conception of subjectivity might contain some room for debate and disagreement, it assumes a coherence of identity. This stable sense of identity allows individuals to recognize and identify *with* like-minded individuals and form communities along lines of commonality (67); such communities, however, form in a milieu that lacks the variety of perspectives capable of calling into question or problematizing the common/shared identity. While the sociability and conviviality of identification within a micro-community might seem preferable to the irresolvable debate of on-going antagonism, for Bishop antagonism is the process that balances forward-looking ideas, the pragmatics of cooperative social practice and the desire for the *détente* of consensus (66). Bishop’s critique makes it clear, as she put it, that “It is no longer enough to say that activating the viewer *tout court* is a democratic act” (78). In the place

of Relational Aesthetics' establishment of micro-utopian social relations and chances for amiable dialogue, the "relational antagonism" model offers situations and provocations that add friction and discomfort to the artist/audience exchange.

Bishop's argument points toward the potential interface between relational art and democratic practice. By focusing upon art practices that are "no longer tied to the direct activation of the viewer, or to their literal participation in the work" (78) for her examples of "antagonism," Bishop somewhat severs participation from relationality. Applying her analytical model to works by artists such as Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn, Bishop traces how situations and provocations bring into focus invested power positions and social responsibilities. These realizations, however, are not specifically linked to audience participation; instead they seem most directly associated with these artists' specific intentions and creative choices. The antagonistic thrust of the projects that Bishop presents does not seem to be directed at the audience that views the work, but instead at the larger field of art and at broader social structures that sanction spectatorship and convey value to an array of unlikely undertakings, representations and objects. While the idea of "relational antagonism" opens up the field of creative possibility and extends the imaginable limits of what constitutes a "relational" work of art, it also opens up and makes indistinct what constitutes participation.

Dialogical Art Practice

Bourriaud and others have taken exception with several points of Bishop's critique,¹³ but while "antagonism" might have its flaws it does suggest there are other ways to conceive relationality and employ art to engage social issues. Another such alternative to Bourriaud's model is art historian and curator Grant Kester's "dialogical aesthetics". These collaborative art practices bring together artists and the participating audience to collectively work towards lasting social improvement. Kester's ideas were originally developed through a series of articles before elaboration in the 2004 volume *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. With dialogical aesthetics, Kester identifies a "collaborative, consultative approach" to creative practice that links "new forms of intersubjective experience with social or political activism" (9). In the UK, the form emerged from the "community arts tradition," while in the USA "temporary public art" and "Allan Kaprow's happenings and performance-based actions" were "particularly influential for artists" moving towards a dialogical approach (Kester, *Conversation* 9). Subsequently the practice spread and has become "global in scope" although dialogical aesthetics is not a coherent or self-identified "movement." Instead it persists as a series of related "inclinations" that mostly transpire "outside the international network of art galleries and museums, curators and collectors." What "unites this disparate network of artists and art collectives," Kester claims, "is a series of provocative assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world

¹³ See Nicolas Bourriaud, "Traffic: The Relational Moment," in *theanyspacewhatever* exhibition catalogue. Liam Gillick also launched a strong rebuke to Bishop. In "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,'" *October* 115 (2006), Gillick accuses Bishop of factual errors and sloppy scholarship (98), of misinterpreting Bourriaud (98) and misrepresenting Laclau and Mouffe's idea of antagonism (99).

and about the kinds of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing” (*Conversation 9*).

Informed by the twin examples of creative cultural production and cultural activism, dialogical practices open up a series of important questions regarding community formation, the integrity of identity, and the right to cultural expression. Whereas Bourriaud identifies sociability and Bishop cites antagonism as the medium for relational art forms, Kester considers dialogue, discussion and negotiation as the medium for this collaborative version of relational art. Following Bakhtin, who considered the work of art as a kind of conversation where “a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view” (Kester 10) may develop, Kester argues that within dialogical art practices, dialogue itself serves as the prime artistic medium. “While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers,” Kester points out, within this particular art form, “conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict” (8). As forums where differing opinions and perspectives come into contact and may be reconciled through discussion, negotiation and compromise, dialogical art practices are primarily a participatory form of art. Kester, however, does not venerate dialogical art practice as a panacea or cure-all. Despite its potential to bring artists and audiences together for collaborative and transformative engagement, Kester wonders whether it is “possible to develop a cross-cultural dialogue without sacrificing the unique identities of individual speakers” (8). Fulfilling this necessity is difficult in dialogical art practices because the artist’s task is to facilitate collaborative undertakings that produce

benefits for his or her constituent participants without dominating the creative relationship (8). Such a creative milieu also stipulates that instead of delivering pre-existing works or applying pre-determined engagement templates, artists develop relational encounters specifically for each audience and facilitate the development of artworks through discussion and negotiation with the participating audience.

Accommodating a multiplicity of differing subjectivities, the art form fosters a dialogue that identifies issues of mutual concern and negotiates resolutions that might benefit the varied participants. To fulfill its emancipatory potential, dialogical art practice requires the “reciprocal openness” of both the artist and the participant, the dialogical exchange produces the subjectivity of both parties through “situational encounters” (90).

To illustrate this model Kester introduces the Austrian art collective WochenKlausur. Founding member Wolfgang Zingg has described the group’s practice as consisting of “concrete interventions” (qtd. in Kester 98) within the social field, where the success of the undertaking depended upon clearly articulated goals. By examining social situations that require improvement the group identifies a “specific problem” (98) and subsequently WochenKlausur works with all the issue’s stakeholders and secures the resources necessary for the issue’s resolution. *Intervention in Community Development* (1997), for instance, developed through conversations with the residents of Ottensheim, Austria and identified the need for the formation of three interest groups that reconfigured the community’s institutional relationships. Each group—one for the town’s youth, another for its elderly residents, and the last designed to develop the town’s “historic center” (98)—articulated needs specific to its constituency, including such “concrete” improvements as a skateboard park for the youth, a weekly market for the

town's centre and an oral history program that documented the life experiences of the community's elderly citizens. Additionally, the dialogue established by WochenKlausur inspired the adoption of community consultation as part of the town council's decision-making process (98).¹⁴ As the WochenKlausur example suggests, dialogue forms a space for issues to be analyzed and for ideas to germinate; the artists involved in the dialogue do not themselves remedy situations, but work at the grassroots-level to help formulate strategies that can achieve concrete social improvements for the dialogue's participants.

While Kester's dialogical emphasis bears some resemblance to Bourriaud's focus upon the social relationships that develop through relational art practices, the ephemeral micro-utopias of conviviality and generosity differ greatly from the lasting effects that are WochenKlausur's aim. As well, the terms of address and how the art projects develop are distinctly different, as dialogical aesthetics are responsive to the uniqueness of the participating communities and the specificity of that community's concerns—the openness of the format is not for formalism's sake but to allow a flexibility that can adapt to the unpredictable circumstances that each project situates. This uniqueness and specificity of audience, however, somewhat limits the potential impact of dialogical aesthetics and its utility as a participatory art form. Dialogical art experiences are only available to communities of participants and only to those communities engaged in collaboration with the dialogical artist. As it offers a viable alternative to the dominant critical model of Relational Aesthetics, dialogical art practice offers a valuable example of participatory art practice even though its applicability and accessibility may be limited.

¹⁴ This dialogical model also yielded the “concrete” formation of a political party based upon community-consultation principles. It subsequently became the third-largest political organization active on Ottensheim's town council (98).

Relate or Else

Examining counter-examples of participatory art practice such as dialogical aesthetics and the form of relational antagonism are worthwhile because the current field of participatory art could benefit from an enhanced variety of perspectives. The problem, as suggested above, is that the influence of Relational Aesthetics is extensive and its examples of creative engagement compels other participants within the cultural field to *relate* to the standards that it is putting into place—a situation that elides and obscures some viable alternative practices. This situation is intriguing in part because of the way that it came about. The accession of Bourriaud’s ideas occurred quickly and, by 1996, the idea of Relational Aesthetic informed the establishment of Manifesta, European Biennial of Contemporary Art. An itinerant biennial without a fixed geographical location, Manifesta’s early curators, specifically Hans Ulrich Obrist (Manifesta 1: 1996) and Barbara Vanderlinden (Manifesta 2: 1998), used Bourriaud’s ideas as organizing principles. As Camile van Winkel noted, Manifesta’s curators “formulated and simultaneously put into practice [Bourriaud’s] model, one that projects a material dissolution of the work of art into a flux of social activity and audience participation” (van Winkel 227). Indeed, van Winkel suggests that Bourriaud’s concepts were “put to use as an exhibition model *before* its theoretical implications had been fully explored and elaborated: The theorization of this ‘new’ aesthetic model was subordinate to its institutionalization” (sic 227).¹⁵ The institutionalization of Bourriaud’s ideas continued

¹⁵ Camile van Winkel’s “The Rhetorics of Manifesta” is part of the massive volume, *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*. In this anthology, Vanderlinden provides an archive of the five biennials and co-edits the work, Obrist interviews Rem Koolhaas and Jacques Le Goff and Hou Hanru provides an essay. Maria Lind acts as one of the respondents to Boris Buden’s essay.

through his own activities at the Palais de Tokyo, where, as Bishop noted above, he explored the idea of the art institution as a “laboratory” for creative cultural investigation. The laboratory model likewise became the curatorial lens of such curators as Obrist and Vanderlinden, Maria Lind (one of Vanderlinden’s co-curators of the second Manifesta) and Hou Hanru (Bishop, “Antagonism” 52).

Like Bourriaud, these relational/laboratory-minded curators have moved into positions of prominence within the creative field.¹⁶ That prominence in part helped to bring attention to participation as a subject of contemporary art discourse and enabled the specific theoretical perspective of Relational Aesthetics to become a prime theoretical lens for analyzing participatory art practice. Two such recent exhibitions help to illuminate this situation: Nancy Spector’s *theanyspacewhatever*, presented at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, and *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, curated by Rudolf Frieling at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The exhibitions overlapped temporally, opening in the Fall of 2008 and closing Winter 2009. Frieling’s exhibition, as mentioned above, featured a historical assemblage tracking participatory art practices over a period of nearly six decades that aimed to examine participatory art in depth and within “a museum context” (Frieling 12). While Frieling’s exhibition seemed designed to undertake a critical examination that was overdue and

¹⁶ Maria Lind has served as director of Kunstverein München and for Iaspis (International Artist Studio Program in Sweden), and she is currently director of the graduate program at the Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies. Vanderlinden and Hanru have both curated numerous exhibitions around the world, including various Biennials, and are currently colleagues at the San Francisco Art Institute. Obrist publishes at an astonishing clip, while serving as Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery, London. In its November 2009 issue, *Art Review* ranked Obrist number one in the magazine’s annual list of the 100 most powerful people in the artworld. On the 2009 list Bourriaud ranked #68 on the 2009 list and 56 in 2010.

timely, Spector's exhibition attempted to re-interpret a range of creative practices usually associated with relational art practice. Featuring artists that rose to prominence during the 1990s, Spector's exhibition suggested that these selected "post-representational" artists were a distinct category from the artists that had made "representational" critique the dominant creative production of the 1980s. While the artists presented by Spector each enjoyed successful independent creative practices, they had also periodically worked in collaboration with each other "to create multiple-authored works that extend the fluidity of their practices while tempering the authority of a singular aesthetic vision" (Spector 16). Noting that the professional affiliation of the group of artists "is grounded in friendship" (16), Spector saw this social network informing the bulk of the coterie's creative production: "their impulse to collaborate reflects the aspects of engagement and sociability that have come to be associated with their respective practices" (16).

While Spector's curatorial interests touch upon some of the terms that are at the centre of this thesis, the sort of creative production that she hints at should not be confused with Fluid Authority. Instead of locating a form that invites the collaborative efforts of the audience and facilitates experiences of creative authorship, Spector's exhibition focuses squarely upon established creative practitioners and imagines a form of collaboration that is the exclusive domain of artists. The most pressing concern with Spector's exhibition, however, is its problematic relationship to Relational Aesthetics: all 10 of the artists in *theanyspacewhatever* were featured in the *Relational Aesthetics* book and nine of them had been included in Bourriaud's earlier *Traffic* exhibition.¹⁷ Likewise, her curatorial essay struggles with the burden of relating to the theoretical model

¹⁷ *theanyspacewhatever* catalogue also includes an essay "Traffic: The Relational Moment" by Bourriaud.

established by Bourriaud. Questioning Bourriaud's emphasis upon "conviviality and interhuman relationships," Spector admitted, "this categorization was a critical, initial attempt to articulate the social and political dimensions of the art of the 1990s"; however, she concludes that "it, like any overarching assessment of an artistic trend or shared sensibility, can delimit as much as it can define" (16). Spector struggles to present an alternative theoretical lens that explicates the work of the artists within the exhibition. Seeming to reject the utility of an aesthetic system to describe the phenomenon since, unlike "stylistic movements" that demonstrate "a coherent visual language," the artists examined by Bourriaud and featured in her own exhibition "all employ markedly different aesthetic strategies" (16); nonetheless, she offers some criteria to argue for the relevance of the artists that she examines.

Trying to distance herself from Bourriaud, Spector attempts to renovate the idea of the social relationship at the heart of Relational Aesthetics. To do this, she re-conceives the social as an opportunity "to merge experience and its representations....to subtly shift the terms of artistic practice to move art beyond representation, and advance its reception beyond mere passivity" (18). When she attempts to clarify how this is different in substance, curiously the shift seems merely semantic: "The work is less about social interaction than a deliberate activation of the social, meaning that the viewer is drawn into the aesthetic experience to become an integral part of the process of perception and cognition" (18). To achieve this goal, Spector claims that several artists use the exhibition as a medium, "expanding its parameters in time and space as a means to engage their audiences in ways that subvert the normal expectations of an art viewing experience" (18). This refurbishment of relationality is problematic on several fronts. Drawing the

viewer “into the aesthetic experience” so that they “become an integral part of the process” is a creative strategy that has been in play at least since Robert Morris’ Minimal sculptures inspired Michael Fried to identify the problem of “theatricality.” As well, Spector’s semantic sleight-of-hand may change “social interaction” to “activation of the social,” but this alteration seems to negate the “sociability” amongst audience members that Relational Aesthetics promised, an action that reconfigures the “social” as an experience that oddly transpires in solitude. Shorn of this possibility for “sociability and conviviality,” the alternative values of “perception and cognition” seem fairly conventional goals, and as evaluative criteria they seem too broad to yield a rigorous critique.

The conventionality of Spector’s articulation of post-representational practices is also evident in her claim that the exhibition might challenge “the normal expectations” of art viewing. Perusing the catalogue and viewing the “on-line exhibition” reveals that in its totality the work seems in keeping with what one would anticipate within a contemporary art exhibition—a succession of variations upon the theme of installation art. Indeed, it seems to confirm Julie H. Reiss’s claim that the once unconventional format of installation has become conventionalized at the core of creative cultural production. Writing before the turn of the millennium, Reiss’s research tracks “the gradual assimilation of Installation art into mainstream museums and galleries” (xv). “Originally presented primarily in alternative art spaces,” Reiss notes, “installations have been routinely commissioned by major art museums and galleries since the early 1990s...[moving] Installation art from the margin of the art world to its center” (xv). As Reiss suggests, what was once an alternative form of cultural expression has increasingly

become the norm; it could even be argued that installation has supplanted traditional disciplinary practices within contemporary art. Spector's notion that such works might "subvert" the viewer's anticipated viewing experience is an especially odd claim as installations are likely a significant part of what is currently our anticipated experience when we visit a contemporary exhibition at a gallery or a museum. Under such circumstances, the "subversive" potential of the work is negated by its very familiarity.

The familiar gestures of the "post-representational" artists (re-)selected by Spector also are evident within the exhibition. Rirkrit Tiravanija provided a lounge-like screening area and Liam Gillick re-designed the reception area while providing signage and didactic material especially for the show. Instead of offering situations that might foster participation or audience collaboration that is often associated with both Relational Aesthetics and the individual artists, they gravitated towards inter-artistic collaboration and a myopic self-examination. Rirkrit Tiravanija's contribution to the exhibition, *CHEW THE FAT*, was a series of 75-minute documentary interviews with the exhibition's artists, assorted friends and colleagues "providing an intimate perspective on the art of the 1990s" (*theany* on-line). Each film was screened upon a dedicated television monitor and seating was provided through floor cushions arranged in arcs before the monitor screens. The location of several screens within close proximity of each other, however, necessitated that the videos' audio was only available through headphones. Thus, while seated near to each other, the headphones sealed each audience member within an individual and isolating aural bubble. In addition to selecting the exhibition's title as his "first contribution to the show" (Spector n.6 25), Gillick's provision of signage gave him something of signing authority over the rest of his peers. Gillick also located audioguide

stalls throughout the Guggenheim, where the audience might obtain *Audioguide II*, prepared by Philippe Parreno. Instead of addressing the work on display, “the soundtrack identifies earlier, iconic works by each of the exhibiting artists, as well as a selection of some of their formative, shared projects...the tour reflects the histories of the individual artists while underscoring the collaborative impulse that has informed their work since the beginning of the 1990s” (*theany* on-line). While this use of the “audioguide” might be counter our anticipated experience, re-iterating “iconic” accomplishments seems more self-serving than subversive. While *Audioguide II* highlights collaborative practices, it offers the idea within a monological format that lacks any feedback mechanism that might allow for discussion or debate. Parreno’s gesture describes the artists’ collaborative interests, but it does not open up collaboration as an experience that is shared with the listener. Instead, it secures collaboration as a privilege reserved for the participating artists.

Within Spector’s problematic curatorial project, collaboration and relationality are part of the exclusive domain of elite-level creative practice. Much of her thinking about post-representational art and how it is evident within the work of the group of artists has promise: it illuminates one productive way of analyzing *post* postmodern art. Where Spector runs into problems is with the “relate—or else” dynamic. As a curator at an elite-level art institution, part of Spector’s duties include *relating* the chosen work to its contemporary contexts—unfortunately Bourriaud’s ubiquitous influence seems to require that Spector relate to the *theanyspacewhatever* artists in terms of Relational Aesthetics, an obligation that overwhelms her own post-representational curatorial perspective and marginalizes it as a subject within the very exhibition that was organized to illustrate it as

a viable analytical category. Bourriaud's influence permeates the careers of the *theanyspacewhatever* artists and he has authored a significant portion of the way that we understand their creative practices. Despite the limitations of Relational Aesthetics, Tiravanija's lounge environment re-iterates Bourriaud's theories of sociability and conviviality. Including Tiravanija and his colleagues in the exhibition required that Spector address the issue of relationality as espoused by Bourriaud. Whether Bourriaud rightly or wrongly applied a veneer of social interactivity to the artists that he highlighted, the necessity to *relate to* the dominance of this idea compels Spector to try to jump through the relationality hoop. Unfortunately, her attempt to re-write socially interactive creative practice within her post-representational trope reduces relationality to inter-artistic collaborations "grounded in friendship" (16) and leaves the audience with no role to play except for that of conventional spectatorship. Shorn of the socially motivated presentational contexts that invited audience interaction, Spector's roster of artists lose the very quality that distinguishes them from any others and they increasingly seem like any number of interchangeable stalwarts from the global "biennial circuit," presenting installation art projects within major exhibitions at significant cultural institutions. As such, the exhibition might as well have featured *anyartistswhomever* and been titled *theeveryexhibitionwherever*.

The ubiquitous quality of participatory creative practice, noted by Groys, to some extent demands an institutional response like the exhibition attempted by Spector. The accretive and responsive quality of elite-level discourse suggests that once such attention is initiated, it too demands a response from its fellow institutions. Spector, a curator employed by a globally recognized (and globally franchised) art institution, has a tacit

obligation to acknowledge such a prevalent turn within creative culture and to participate in the developing debate. The prevalence of Relational Aesthetics compels Spector to attempt to absorb the idea and re-spin it in her own direction; such a strategy ultimately ends up marginalizing her own perspective as she struggles to differentiate herself from Bourriaud's example. The result of this amassed institutional attention is that it perpetuates the importance of Bourriaud's gloss upon participatory creative practice and postulates it as a mandatory standard. Here, the need to "relate or else" suggests the obligation to account for relationality; failure to do so might result in cultural marginalization and loss of cognitive legibility, because if one is not included in cultural discourse to what extent can one be said to be a cultural participant? My own interest in the subject is an example of this: as I attempt to understand participation in the field of creative art, I have an obligation to account for this issue through the cultural parameters established by Bourriaud. To have some purchase upon participatory issues, the "relate or else" dynamic compels me to "relate" my project to Bourriaud's precedence or risk my potential professional standing by failing to acknowledge this necessity. Even though this chapter fulfills this obligation, the cautionary example set by *theanyspacewhatever* illustrates the difficulties inherent in negotiating the terrain of a cultural field when the influence of a single idea has gained such prominence.

While Rudolf Frieling has pointed out that "There are as many motivations to engage in participatory art as there are reasons to refuse," it is not always easy to refuse to participate in dominant cultural discourses. While the notion of having options is attractive it is worth wondering how long the opportunity to choose whether or not we will participate in art or discourse will remain. After all, Frieling also pointed out that

“we have no choice whether or not to participate in the larger context of society” (12). Under such circumstances, where participation seems poised to become a compulsory standard, it is worthwhile to seek a form of participation within the cultural field that can provide an example that may affect the very cultural field that demands that participation. In place of participatory forms that model “micro-utopia,” it is necessary to locate participatory situations that sanction creative engagement and the experience of creative authorship.

Chapter Two: Inviting Participation: The Legacy of Allan Kaprow's Early Works

As the past chapter illustrated, the contemporary field of creative culture features an array of participatory art practices that promise to provide its audiences with experiences as varied as the fleeting euphoria of conviviality and sociability, and of the lasting pride in having contributed to an undertaking that fostered concrete social improvements. Lacking in that account of participation was any mention of artistic practices that attempted to engage the audience's creativity or that might have made authorship an available and accessible experience. This is not to say that such examples do not exist, only that they are sometimes difficult to distinguish in a creative milieu that is chiefly defined via Bourriaud's theoretical criteria. To begin to locate such divergent perspectives and examine their practical applications, we shall now look to Allan Kaprow as an artist whose creative practice preceded the emergence of Bourriaud's ideas. Within Kaprow's early career, the chapter identifies a range of creative perspectives and precedents whose spectral echoes are still evident in the field of contemporary participatory art practice. These methods of inviting audience participation and providing opportunities for creative engagement are what I call Kaprow's "legacy" and they are analogous to the techniques applied in *Fluid Authority*.

Kaprow was neither the first nor the only artist to turn his attention towards the audience during the long twentieth century. As a practicing artist and theorist, he worked in the wake of several avant-garde movements whose works of art were designed specifically to provoke an impassioned audience response, but while the Italian Futurists

might have taken pleasure in being booed as they countered the audience's sensibilities, Kaprow seemed more interested in inviting his audience to become essential performers within his innovative art practice. In place of the one-off confrontations and cognitive skirmishes of the avant-garde, Kaprow's sustained interest in exploring participatory forms of spectatorship yielded a wide repertoire of creative techniques that are still detectable within contemporary art's revival of participatory art practices. To account for Kaprow's interest in developing a participatory art practice this chapter examines the period of the late 1950s to the mid 1960s when Kaprow was active on the New York City "scene" and before his eventual relocation to California at the end of the decade. During this period Kaprow developed his "Environments," proto-installation artworks that featured implicit invitations to participate. As well the works that became famous as the "Happenings" were also launched and even though they hinted at the possibility of participation, the works' initially failed to deliver upon the promise to transform the audience into participants. Compelled by opportunities to present Happenings beyond the New York Scene, Kaprow would drastically change his working methods and would ultimately develop the "Happening, for participants only." Subsequently he envisioned the form of the "mail-order" Happening, where the participant might execute the work of art in his absence. As it examines this developmental trajectory, this chapter charts Kaprow's changing view of the audience and his growing repertoire of methods for inviting the spectator's participation.

While participation has assumed an important role in contemporary creative cultural production and reception, Kaprow has yet to receive the acknowledgment that is commensurate with his efforts and accomplishments. Likewise, the Happenings, despite

innovatively combining spatial and durational elements, have not achieved the level of recognition and esteem of avant-garde gestures mounted by the Italian Futurists, the Dadaists or the Surrealists. Nor has Kaprow, despite coining the practice's name and acting as its chief critical voice, attained the prominence of Futurism's Marinetti or Surrealism's Breton. While critical attention is belatedly growing, especially as pertaining to Kaprow's efforts to investigate the line separating art and everyday life, in the expanding field of participatory art practices he seems to only garner begrudging acknowledgment.¹⁸ It is true that Kaprow developed this innovative perspective alongside several fellow artists that concurrently explored Happenings and in close association with Fluxus, a group of artists also interested in the possibilities of participation, but while Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine and Red Grooms would contribute memorable Happenings, none of these artists demonstrated Kaprow's dedication to performance art. Likewise, while Fluxus introduced a wide range of practices that accommodated audience interaction, that organization's diffuse nature makes it difficult to track the development of its interest in participatory art practices. Thus, while Kaprow's undertakings were not unique, what set him apart from his contemporaries was his sustained focus upon performance art practice and responsive development of a range of methods that invited audience participation. These techniques, as well, form a repertoire that, in following chapters, I suggest are retrievable examples still viable for inviting participation in the contemporary cultural field.

¹⁸ Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* acknowledges in passing the influence of "Fluxus happenings and performances" (25) upon Relational art practices, but does not mention Kaprow specifically. Grant Kester credits "Kaprow's happenings and performance-based actions [as] particularly influential for artists in the United States" (9), that are engaged in "dialogical" art practices.

To explore this innovative combination of live performance and audience participation, this chapter proposes that Kaprow's creative and theoretical efforts are a series of "avant-garde gestures." A term originally coined by Brian O'Doherty to describe creative endeavors that aim for two audiences, "one which was there and one—most of us—which wasn't" (88). As such, avant-garde gestures do not only privilege those viewers present at the initial art event, but also emphasize the artwork's impact upon audiences that are spatially and temporally dispersed. With his Happenings and Environments, Kaprow did not produce concrete and discrete images or objects, but performative exemplars—unstable cognitive and experiential properties that could be formed and re-formed through subsequent critical debate. In addition to the initial launching of his work, Kaprow sustained the work's viability by publishing articles that explicated the practice's theoretical perspectives and cultural relevance for audiences that were not present at the work's physical instantiation. While the works might seem to have a brief life that produced vague memories, the dual audience assumed by the avant-garde gesture enabled the cognitive durability and diachronic transportability of Kaprow's work.

The on-going effects and historical relevance of an artist's works, while initiated by specific gestures, are somewhat difficult to discern. In many ways, what Kaprow is remembered for inhibits our understanding of his accomplishments. As with many innovative artists, a single "signature gesture" unfortunately stands indexically for the whole of Kaprow's creative endeavours. While the readymade entrenched Marcel Duchamp in the collective creative consciousness and the drip-painting secured Jackson Pollock's canonical consecration, Kaprow is often associated with the work that helped to

name the practice of the Happenings, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*.¹⁹ Even though the work is rightly celebrated as an innovative hybrid moment important to the development of both performance and installation art practices, it unfortunately featured an impoverished conceptualization of participation. Despite being included as part of the “Cast of Participants,” the performance’s “visitors” were given no greater participatory responsibility than to “sit in various chairs” and to relocate from one chair to another as directed by Kaprow. Because of this limitation, it is necessary to see *18 Happenings* in the larger context of Kaprow’s early career and consider how the work echoed and extended his nascent exploration of participation, even as it foreshadowed innovative participatory precedents that Kaprow subsequently introduced in his later works.

While O’Doherty’s notion of an avant-garde gesture suggests the on-going cognitive and scholarly viability of progressively oriented works, it does not account for the development of the gesture as an idea within and dispersed throughout an artist’s overall career. To track the incremental development of the issue of participation within Kaprow’s works, it is productive to look to Alfred Gell’s notion of an artist’s *oeuvre* as a corpus of distributed objects. Introduced in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, the corpus of distributed objects suggests that although they appeared as distinct or unique instances that are materially, spatially and temporally separate, the amassed instantiations of an artist’s works together form a *set* (221-2). Within this amassed “set,”

¹⁹ How signature gestures are associated and “owned” by specific artists is nicely illustrated by Vuk Vidor’s *Art History* images, a series that features a list of artists’ names formulated with the iconography, material practice or medium that they are most associated with. The “Top 50” version begins with “Mondrian Owns Geometry” and ends with “Buren Owns Stripes.” In between, Pollock is granted ownership of “drips” and Duchamp, “everything.” The work also was exhibited at The Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France) in 2004, while Nicholas Bourriaud was co-director of the venue.

there is a sense of fluidity where distinctions between ‘preparatory’ and ‘finished’ works (232-3) are less apparent than they might seem. A work that might appear to be “conceived independently” and completed as a work in its own right might also be recognized as a sketch that mapped out the possibilities of a subsequent work. Gell, following Husserl, formulates this idea in terms of *protention* and *retention*, where a work of art may be by turns the precursor or anticipation of a future work, and the recapitulation, re-iteration or resolution of an earlier creative gesture (234-5).

Gell’s theory of distributed objects is especially useful for analyzing the works of a prolific artist such as Kaprow, because rather than emphasizing the production of singular masterworks, it rethinks creative agency as a cumulative process where an artist’s *oeuvre* is comprised of the aggregate of multiple undertakings in dialogue with each other. By liquidating the notion of concise or discrete individual works, an artist’s corpus of distributed objects points towards the possibility that a number of seemingly separate pieces together form a chain of thought that initially defines a problem, then evolves through several instantiations to reach a succession of temporary and contingent resolutions. While Gell developed the idea of the distributed objects as a method for locating creative consciousness and to investigate how a post-biological consciousness persists through the material remnants of artistic cultural production, analogously it describes how the ideas embodied in images, objects and practices may persist and remain accessible over time and across a range of creative undertakings. In Kaprow’s case, the idea of participation grew into a thematic throughout the late 1950s and into the mid-1960s; the protentions of a participatory form of art arose throughout his early writings, *Environments and Happenings* (including the seminal *18 Happenings in 6*

Parts) before they formed a repertoire of participatory models. Once launched these models returned as retentions throughout the later Happenings “for participants only,” and the often overlooked project *Self-Service*, where Kaprow made available to his audience a corpus of participatory performances dispersed throughout three cities (New York, Boston and Los Angeles) and designed to occur over a four-month period. Throughout this period Kaprow anticipated and established many of the participatory art models that have become important practices within the contemporary cultural field.

Articulating the Pollockian Legacy

The cultural field that Kaprow first worked within was vastly different from our current one, and ideas of performance, installation and participatory art were only beginning to emerge. Kaprow’s professional career was launched at the mid-point of the twentieth century just as New York City was evolving into *the* global centre of culture.²⁰ Before his arrival on the New York scene, the value of “innovation” and “advanced art” had both been well established via the influx of avant-garde artists that had fled Europe in the World War II era and the rise of a generation of American artists that had, as Michael Leja has noted, aligned their practices with “the modernist paradigm and its mechanisms for aesthetic advancement” (14). Informed by critic Clement Greenberg’s ideas of progressive aesthetic evolution (C. A. Jones 312), a group of advanced artists exploring Action Painting and Abstract Expressionism coalesced as the New York School.

²⁰ In his introduction to *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945-1964*, Serge Guilbaut notes that during this period, New York City was supplanting Paris as the global cultural centre with the ultimate “‘triumph’ of American painting” (xiii), occurring midway through the 1960s. In that volume, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh also notes the importance of the 1958 European touring exhibition, *The New American Painting*, as beginning the New York School’s ascension to global prominence (85).

Recognizing the utility of promoting their activities as a continuation of European avant-gardism (Leja 14), the group claimed “status as a *traditional* avant-garde, meaning that it [saw] itself as upholding the values and extending the work of prior avant-gardes” (16).²¹ Whether existing as a legitimate avant-garde movement or only perceived as such,²² the artists of the New York School established a strategy to gain recognition and to secure prominent positions within the cultural field. By the mid-point of the century the New York School became the field’s dominant sensibility, while New York City became the dominant locale, positioned at the forefront of “global” culture.

Despite the radically different direction that Allan Kaprow would eventually follow, he emerged into the field of cultural production with an avant-garde pedigree. He had studied painting at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Art under Hofmann, an expatriate European artist credited by Clement Greenberg as being “a major fountainhead of style and ideas” (67) influential to artists of the New York School. Additionally, Kaprow’s Master’s thesis in Art History examined Piet Mondrian and was completed under the tutelage of Marxist art historian Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University (1952). Following his graduation, Kaprow began exhibiting as an artist and founded the Hansa Gallery with a number of colleagues he had met while studying with Hofmann (Schimmel 9). By 1956, Kaprow had invented the Action Collage, hasty assemblages of

²¹ Leja’s emphasis. By fashioning themselves as the inheritors of the European avant-garde, however, the New York School contravened the avant-garde’s staunch anti-traditionalism, and re-wrote the avant-garde’s *revolutionary* standards as *evolutionary* ones. In such a situation, as Leja points out, “avant-gardism is really an alternative form of academicism, one demanding novelty and experimentation” (16).

²² Leja’s article uses group dynamics to assess whether the New York School might qualify as an avant-garde. His conclusion is unequivocal; “In order to make the New York School into an avant-garde, that synthesis assumes a measure of agreement about means and ends among the artists which is not justified by the historical evidence” (30).

cardboard scraps, tinfoil sheets, and remnants of his own torn paintings, that seem both retentions and extensions of the then dominant practices of Action Painting and Abstract Expressionism (Kelley, *Childsplay* 13). Instead of the “mythic gravity and heroic seriousness” (13) of the New York School’s attempts to strip painting to its essentials, Kaprow’s integration of all manner of refuse from the everyday world pushed the painted surface out into three dimensional space suggesting a protention of the Environments that he subsequently explored, while the embrace of a performative and temporally charged painting process pointed towards the imminent Happenings.

By 1958, Kaprow had gained a profile as an artist within the New York City art scene. His most important early work, though, might have been his article “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock.” Published in *Art News* some two years after the death of the Modernist painting giant, the article not only acknowledged Kaprow’s own (and his contemporaries’) indebtedness to Pollock,²³ but also attempted to map out the post-Pollockian creative terrain. For Kaprow, at the centre of Pollock’s innovative practice was the sense that the paintings “ignored the confines of the rectangular field [painting surface] in favor of a continuum going in all directions simultaneously, *beyond* the dimensions of any work,” an effect, Kaprow reported, that “has led to the remarks that his art gives the impression of going on forever” (“Legacy,” 5). While important to the progressive practice of painting, Kaprow’s unique interpretation of Pollock’s practice also transformed the role of the viewer. Pollock’s mural-sized canvases compromised the

²³ Invoking what Amelia Jones has called “clearly avant-gardist rhetoric” (n.9: 264), Kaprow claimed that Pollock was “the embodiment of our ambition for absolute liberation and a secretly cherished wish to overturn old tables of crockery and flat champagne. We saw in his example the possibility of an astonishing freshness, a sort of ecstatic blindness” (Kaprow, “Legacy” 1).

viewing distance that separated the audience from the work of art. As Kaprow saw it, Pollock's work refused to hold its place upon the gallery walls and instead came "out at us...right into the room," so that the works "ceased to [be] paintings and became environments" (6). Transgressing into the physical viewing space, the work "confronted, assaulted, [and] sucked in" the viewer as a participant and within this immersive viewing experience, Kaprow suggested, the audience "must be acrobats, constantly shuttling between an identification with the hands and body that flung the paint and stood 'in' the canvas and submission to the objective markings, allowing them to entangle and assault us." Flipping back and forth between immersion and identification, Kaprow realized, that distinctions between the "artist, the spectator, and the outer world" (5) became interchangeable.

While this blurring of identity suggested a radically different form of engagement with a work of art and seems a potentially fertile site for the development of a participatory art practice, Kaprow was not yet able to exploit this opportunity. He was, however, able to see the implications of Pollock's immersive and experiential practice for one portion of the audience—artists creating in Pollock's wake. While Pollock had re-defined the limits of painting he was not able, Kaprow surmised, to take this increasingly spatial and temporal creative practice to its logical conclusion and forsake painting. Poised at this decisive edge Pollock died, leaving subsequent painters with a choice between reiteration and renunciation. As Kaprow saw it, the post-Pollockian artist might "continue in this vein. Probably many good 'near-paintings' can be done varying this esthetic...without departing from it or going further." The "other [option] is to give up the making of paintings entirely" (7), a choice Kaprow believed was the direction that the

next generation of artists would follow and indeed it is a protention of Kaprow's own then imminent renunciation of painting.

Forsaking the scholarly tone used earlier in the article, Kaprow adopted a more visionary voice throughout his essay's final paragraphs. In a section that Richard Kostelanetz cited as "among the most important passages in modern esthetics" (93), the post-Pollockian terrain was evocatively articulated.²⁴ Instead of re-iterating and validating the New York School's aesthetic models, Kaprow proposed an embrace of overlooked creative terrain. Responding to the embodied, temporal and spatial aspects of Pollock's practice, Kaprow called for artists to "be dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday lives" (Kaprow, "Legacy" 7). In place of the dominance of the optical and the medium of paint, Kaprow predicted a more fully sensual art experience enabled by an effluence of non-traditional media, where "[o]bjects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon light, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies" (7, 9). Moving quite a distance from Pollock's challenging and indeterminate painting process, Kaprow envisioned art's return to the familiar and the commonplace: "these bold creators show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored." Despite this re-acquaintance with the everyday world and usual social practice, though, Kaprow claimed that artists would yet produce "entirely unheard-of happenings and events," as part of what Kaprow called "this new concrete art" (9). In "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" Kaprow had written a preparatory sketch of his future

²⁴ Kostelanetz also suggested that Kaprow's reading of Pollock influenced "several students and colleagues at Rutgers who have since established themselves as important artists (George Segal, Lucas Samaras, Robert Watts, Robert Whitman, and Roy Lichtenstein) but it also reached other maturing artists who were then total strangers, among them Claes Oldenburg" (*Innovative Art(ist)s*, 93).

activities, even as he worked through his own retentions of Pollockian avant-garde creative practice.

This New Concrete Art

Echoing his own earlier Action collages and early assemblages, the sensual materialism of “this new concrete art” combined the accessibility and immediacy of the world around us (the everyday) and the notion of a spatial, temporal and ephemeral art (“happenings and events”) that would become Kaprow’s difficult-to-define, yet fertile creative zone. The immersive spectatorial experience that Kaprow noted in the article also featured prominently in his creative work during 1958. The two untitled projects presented at the Hansa Gallery (the first of Kaprow’s many “Environments”), both resonated with the “Legacy” article’s call for an art that “ceased to [be] paintings and became environments” (Kaprow “Legacy,” 6). Where the Action collages’ three-dimensional space had been built up through the layering of material upon the picture plane, the Hansa Gallery’s architecture now provided a space that could be augmented and reconfigured from within with a broad repertoire of materials. The Environment presented in March 1958 featured hanging layers of cloth and transparent plastic painted in red, blue and black that were distributed throughout the room. The plastic sheets created corridors that “invited” the viewer to wander through the space where they might discover tiny vestibules strung with Christmas lights.²⁵ In addition to these visual and tactile elements, the Environment was augmented by mechanical sounds that could be heard coming from a number of points in the ceiling (Kelley, *Childsplay* 21).

²⁵ From a review published in *Arts* magazine (May 1958), signed J.R.M.

Expanding his approach for the November Environment, Kaprow installed tangles of raffia that hung from the ceiling and a wall of shattered mirror shards banked by parallel strips of spotlights that were directed at the spectators. Once again sound was used, while the artist introduced an olfactory element by having an oscillating fan circulate the smell of chemicals (21). With both Environments, the manipulation of the space seemed designed to envelope the viewer, and the physical elements were no longer confined to the surface of a canvas as in the Action collages, but came out “right into the room” (Kaprow, “Legacy” 6), as Pollock’s paintings had. As they peered through skeins of paint and diaphanous transparent plastic to negotiate the space, viewers might have imagined that they were physically passing through the layers of material imbedded within one of Pollock’s works. The invasive sensual qualities of sound and smell, “confronted, assaulted, sucked in” (6) the viewers and subverted their anticipated experience. Jeff Kelley infers just this sort of defamiliarized viewing experience, when he notes that by transforming the viewing space into the work of art, Kaprow challenged, “the social conventions built into the relationship between the artist and the audience, resulting in experiences that were neither performed nor witnessed, but were a synthesis of the two” (*Childsplay*, 20). Instead of a viewer fixed into a position of passive spectatorship before a singular/performing object, the environment solicited movement; moving through the space, the viewer activated layers of sensual stimuli and accretively acquired a collage of experiences. In this way the viewer participated in the determination of the art experience, actively formulating an unpredictable combination of sensory stimulations from the array that the artist has made available.

While the immersive quality of these earliest Environments and the way that they made the viewer an active part of the space is imaginable, it is not clear whether Kaprow was satisfied with the level of audience participation achieved in these works. In “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art,” the catalogue essay prepared for the November Environment, Kaprow imagined the sort of engagement that his audience would experience and surmised that “we do not come to look *at* things. We simply enter, are surrounded, and become part of what surrounds us, passively or actively according to our talents for ‘engagement’” (Kaprow, “Notes” 11). As they became a part of the work and an active element within it, each viewer’s presence supposedly changed the conditions and “the ‘meaning’ of the work” (11). While the viewer might “move in and about the work at any pace or any direction” (12), Kaprow offered no other specific avenues for creative participation. While Jeff Kelley suggests that Kaprow’s immersive strategies successfully “blurred the distinctions between performers and audience members” (*Childsplay* 22), the sort of performers that the Hansa Environments produced, though unscripted, were only permitted to “perform” in a fairly limited way. The participating viewer might choose the sequential order of the collage-like experience, but these choices were derived from a range of options pre-determined by Kaprow. Further, the Environments did not contain any opportunity for the viewer to participate as a collaborator that might affect or transform the work they encountered. Once the viewer departed from the space, the Environment presumably was as Kaprow had initially designed it.

The viewer’s experience in the pair of untitled Environments, while not creative, was unpredictable and counter to the art spectator’s perceived role that prevailed in 1958.

Kaprow astutely underscored this difference and clearly distinguished his work from past creative practice. Describing the sensual experiences that he had devised, he noted that they “have been composed in such a way to offset any desire to see them in the light of the traditional, closed, clear forms of art as we have known them” (12). Contrasting the new open form of the Environment with the closed structure of past works of art, Kaprow linked his “advanced” creative practice with the experience of everyday life. “What has been worked out instead,” Kaprow stressed, “is a form that is as open and fluid as the shapes of our everyday experience but does not simply imitate them” (12). While the purported subject matter might have been familiar, the Environments placed a great deal of onus onto the viewer: “I believe that this form places a much greater responsibility on visitors than they have had before. The ‘success’ of a work depends on them as well as on the artist” (12). At this point in his theorization and his practice, however, Kaprow did not expand upon what exactly these “responsibilities” might be or what would constitute a successful engagement with the work. As he equated his Environments to “the shapes of our everyday experience” (12), Kaprow re-iterated the point he had made about “a new concrete art,” and reasserted that it might keep the line between art and life in some tension,²⁶ but the specifics of the viewer’s responsibilities and the implications of fulfilling this obligation remained elusive.

²⁶ Kaprow’s discussion of the everyday and artistic practice anticipates Peter Bürger’s famous definition of avant-garde desire. In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Bürger stressed the avant-gardes’ goal as the reconnection of art and life: “The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men” (49).

“Something to Take Place: A Happening”

While neither of the Hansa Environments nor “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art” fully grasped the potential and implications of participatory spectatorship, their mutual concern for the issues of viewer mobility and the individualization of each audience member’s experience figure as important retentions within the then imminent *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. Long before the work reached its fruition in October of 1959, Kaprow began to groom his audience for the work-in-progress. In early 1959 a sketch of the performance titled, “The Demiurge,” which was subtitled “Something to take place: a happening,” was published in *Anthologist*, Rutgers University’s literary journal. Subsequently, Kaprow devised an innovative publicity campaign that intervened directly into the everyday lives of his prospective audience. In the place of the usual exhibition notice, a form-letter was distributed to select New Yorkers that announced that “Eighteen happenings will take place,” and that invited the recipient to collaborate with the artist “in making these events take place” (Kaprow qtd. in Kirby 67). To pique the reader’s curiosity, Kaprow hinted that “[a]s one of the seventy-five persons present, you will become part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them.” These happenings, Kaprow suggested, were a “different art, [where] the artist takes off from life,” a statement that asserted the work’s innovative quality even as it kept the relationship of art and life closely aligned. As with the Hansa Environments, Kaprow once more distinguished his work from previously existing creative categories by warning his potential audience not to “look for paintings, sculpture, the dance, or music. The artist disclaims any intention to provide them.” Additionally, he slyly insinuated the forthcoming creation of a new aesthetic form, “[t]he present event is created in a medium

which Mr. Kaprow finds refreshing to leave untitled” (67). Through the form letter’s direct address the importance of the audience’s participation is explicit, though the details of the participation are unclear. At a historical distance, though, by merely opening the letter, the receiver became a participant within Kaprow’s avant-garde gesture.

The textual protentions of *18 Happenings* continued with additional invitations and notices. One famous version was housed in transparent plastic envelopes, and mixed fragments of torn paper containing information about the performance with scraps of Kaprow’s collages, photographs, wood and cinnamon sticks (*Goldberg Performance*, 128, Kelley *Childsplay* 33). Another notice was a two-sided poster, printed in stark red ink; one side featured information about the dates, times, and location of the performance, and what amounts to a detailed inventory of *18 Happenings*’ contents. Once again Kaprow teased his prospective audience by alluding to what they might experience: “There are three rooms for this work, each different in size and feeling. The rooms are nearly transparent. No matter where a person is, he is aware of something happening in another room” (*18 Happenings* poster). As he described the configuration of the space, Kaprow suggested that it would enable an experience calibrated by access, distance and proximity. Also in the list of the performance’s contents there was a mention of “[c]hairs...arranged where guests are to be seated. Each guest will sit once in a different room. Some guests will also act”. Coming in the midst of other components, including Christmas lights, collages, mirrors, tape-recorded sounds and “non-human actors,” the viewer/guest might have felt they were an element at Kaprow’s disposal.

Once more Kaprow identified a participatory role for the viewer but neglected to fully explain the responsibilities of that participation; instead he pointed to his visitors’

roles as interpreters and patrons. Closing the inventory with a pair of intriguing points, Kaprow first asserted that “[t]hese actions will mean nothing clearly formulable (sic) so far as the artist is concerned” (*18 Happenings* poster). Secondly, he deftly transformed his potential audience into patrons by appealing to his readers’ democratic and avant-garde sensibilities. “We who sympathize with the artist’s freedom of expression,” Kaprow declared, “who enjoy the experience inherent in advanced ideas, who affirm the artist’s right—nay obligation—to present his vision to the world unfettered have an especial obligation to tender moral and financial support to the avant-garde.” Warned that the groundbreaking work would run a deficit unless it was “promptly and generously supported,” the prospective patrons were also assured that the “artist’s confidence in [his audience’s] support has made this event possible.” In the brief space of a few sentences Kaprow piled on his audience’s imminent responsibilities: from participant, to prime meaning-maker, to underwriter of an expensive creative undertaking. Those that made an advance reservation (Kirby 68) and accepted Kaprow’s invitations to participate included a “soon-to-be who’s who” (Kelley 34) of the New York cultural scene: David Tudor, Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Leo Castelli, Ivan Karp, Dan Flavin, Meyer Schapiro, Fairfield Porter (34), and perhaps Marcel Duchamp.²⁷ Guests that also took the patronage

²⁷ Dick Higgins seems to be the only source that lists Duchamp. Serving as one of the “guests” that “paints,” Higgins recalls that “Duchamp was in the audience and I watched him; he seemed quite uninterested in what he was seeing, and I do not recall that he even stayed through the entire performance” (Higgins 172). As the painters were seated amongst the audience and emerged from the seating area to perform their tasks, Higgins had some opportunity to observe Duchamp at length. Kaprow’s audience movement strategies, however, relocated the guests twice during the performance and might have made it difficult for Higgins to keep track of Duchamp for the performance’s duration.

bait included, at the \$5 rate, George Brecht and John Cage, while George Segal contributed \$10.²⁸

When the guests arrived, each received three cards stapled together and a one-page, typewritten programme. Down the left-hand side of the programme was a “cast of participants” (*18 Happenings* programme), headed by Kaprow, “who speaks and plays a musical instrument.” The list then included the primary performers (Rosalyn Montague, Shirley Prendergast, Lucas Samaras, Janet Weinberger and Robert Whitman), a group of artists including Sam Francis, Red Grooms, Dick Higgins, Alfred Leslie and George Segal, “each of whom paints,” and finally “the visitors-who sit in various chairs.” While the chair-boundness seems to be the antithesis of participation, Kaprow took great pains to score this simple activity. After the programme explained that the event’s structure consisted of six parts each featuring three simultaneous happenings, the instructions outlined the visitors’ role: “You have been given three cards. Be seated as they instruct you. That is, be sure to change your place for set three and for set five.” Dictated by the three cards, the viewer might be instructed as such: “Part 1 and 2-take a seat in room 3,” “Part 3 and 4-take a seat in room 1,” and “Part 5 and 6-take a seat in room 2.” To make this point as clear as possible, the programme explained that between “part one and two there is a two minute interval. Remain seated,” while between “part two and three there is

²⁸ Jeff Kelley noted that Robert Motherwell contributed \$10, but did not attend (34). A successful Abstract Expressionist painter, Motherwell also edited the influential volume, *The Dada Painters and Poets*. Al Hansen, an important figure in the development of Happenings in the New York scene, incorporated readings from Motherwell’s book into his *Hall Street Happening*. The anything-goes structure of Hansen’s performance nicely illustrates how Happenings came to develop a reputation as spontaneous and chaotic affairs. See Al Hansen’s *A Primer of Happenings & Time/Space Art*, (11-20).

a fifteen minute interval. You may move about freely.”²⁹ This pattern, alternating “free” movement and enforced “seating,” was repeated throughout the event. In addition to controlling the viewer’s movements, Kaprow explicitly tried to limit the viewer’s response to the work, concluding the list of instructions by stating: “There will be *no applause after each set*. You may applaud after the sixth set if you wish, although there will be no ‘curtain call’” (Kaprow *18 Happenings*).

Confined to chairs, occasionally relocated within the space and prohibited from response during the performance—all these clearly compromised the audience’s opportunity to participate. While *18 Happenings*’ pre-performance invitations and performance programme suggested an innovative role for the audience, that promise was not fulfilled through participation. Instead, Kaprow’s innovations concerned devising an experience of the performance that was inevitably partial (Sell 145) and indeterminate. Revisiting the unpredictable and individualized viewing experiences triggered by the earlier *Untitled Environments*, each of *18 Happenings*’ participating “guests” would experience a unique collage of experiences from the multiple vantage points devised by Kaprow; but where the audience had previously enjoyed the greatest degree of choice and mobility, as part of *18 Happenings* the viewer’s experience was severely restricted and strictly governed. As he had done with the preceding Hansa Gallery proto-installations, Kaprow composed a sophisticated collage of visual, aural and olfactory elements to produce an immersive environment. Within the Reuben Gallery’s loft space Kaprow dispersed multiple simultaneous points of attention throughout three separate, but adjoining rooms, permitting varying degrees of viewer sensory perception. In each of the

²⁹ Underlining as in citation.

performance's six parts, each room was the site of one of three simultaneously occurring "happenings." Depending upon location one audience member might have access to certain happenings while others were inaccessible; as well, location created both the possibility of having to choose between numerous potential points of focus. To create this situation, Kaprow had rigorously re-configured the Gallery's large rectangular loft into three adjoining rooms and a long hallway that ran parallel to, and entered into, each of the rooms. The walls of each room were constructed from translucent plastic sheeting stretched over rough wood frames, an effect that Michael Kirby suggested emphasized the "artificiality of the rooms" (69). As well, passageways joined each of the three rooms.

Kaprow's design emphasized the separation between the three spaces and offered a combination of clear and obscured perspectives upon these adjacent venues. While the walls of the rooms were largely translucent plastic, vision and sound were both obscured by this material. Also restricting visual access were such items as the large rectangle of muslin that was stretched near the passageway between Rooms One and Two, and several coloured ovals that were adhered to the walls; conversely, several mirrors were also located throughout the three rooms, by turns extending and limiting visual access. Because of the open passageways, one viewer might be able to see and hear what was occurring in other rooms, while a viewer in the next seat might have to be satisfied with an obscure view and sound muffled by the plastic sheet wall. As well, items such as the muslin sheet might totally block off the visual recognition of an action in the next room, even as its odours and sounds caught one's attention. An audience member might also catch a reflected glimpse in one of the mirrors of an otherwise unattainable action. Paying

attention to what transpired in other spaces, though, might distract the viewer from the happenings in his or her immediate vicinity.

Instead of attempting to reconstruct the sequence of diverse activities, sounds, smells and images that Kaprow devised for his three rooms in its entirety,³⁰ an undertaking that Mike Sell notes suggests “a totality that was unavailable to the viewer-participants” (145), it is better to consider how a guest might have perceived his or her experience. Science fiction writer Samuel Delaney, one of the visitor-participants at Kaprow’s 1959 performance, retrospectively re-visited his experience in his memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water*. While he recalls focusing upon a mechanical toy that one of the performers activated near him,³¹ Delaney’s account is mostly distinguished by his unrequited desire to know what was transpiring in the other rooms (Sell 148; Butt 118-9). Mike Sell used the memoir to pry open how Kaprow undermined “spectatorial authority” (Sell 144) by devising an “inevitably partial, accidental, unverifiable” (144) viewing experience. Although Gavin Butt changes the terms somewhat, he also explores this account to understand the “epistemological uncertainty” (118) of Delaney’s subjective remembrance of the event and to question the reliability of first-hand accounts of performances.

³⁰ Should one desire a detailed account of the entire happening, see Michael Kirby’s *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pages 67-82. Noël Carroll, however, warns that Kirby was “a champion” of descriptive criticism, a tendency that attempts to “describe its objects as fully and dispassionately as possible—it was meant to be completely non-interpretive and non-evaluative” (89). The problem with this form of detailed account, in Carroll’s view, is “that it [is] virtually unreadable by anyone who had not seen the work in question (and unnecessary for those who had)” (89).

³¹ Delaney, an African-American, does not describe the toy in detail, but Michael Kirby did and its racial appearance could explain Delaney’s focus upon it: “About one foot high, it was a brightly colored figure of a Negro dancing on a drum...the legs jiggled and swung frantically and erratically” (77).

While Delaney never had the opportunity to witness *18 Happenings* in its entirety because of Kaprow's rigorous control of spectatorial access, the uncertainty and partiality of his experience might have been nuanced and augmented by an additional factor that Kaprow integrated into the design of the performance. Kaprow had conspicuously integrated intervals and intermissions throughout *18 Happenings'* structure. Featuring three carefully timed intervals between parts (two minutes each) and the two more lengthy intermissions (fifteen minutes each), *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* actually consisted of more time for discussion and reflection than for attentive spectatorship.³² During the fifteen-minute interludes, the audience was free to move about before they re-located to the next room designated. Kirby mused that, within this time slot, "perhaps some of [the spectators] inquired of their friends what had been going on in the other rooms and described what they had seen" (78). While intermissions are a common component of conventional theatrical productions where the audience members might discuss a shared experience, with *18 Happenings* each visitor-participant possessed a very individualized experience and the intermission provided an opportunity to compare the variances between these individual experiences and for the audience to fill in one another's experiential gaps. Participating as witnesses and informants, each audience member obliquely participated in the creation and re-creation of *18 Happenings*, while contributing to the accumulated body of memory that continues to stand-in for the absent work. While Samuel Delaney yearned to learn what occurred in other parts of the

³² Both Stephanie Rosenthal ("Agency for Action" 66) and André Lepecki (during the "Re-doing" panel discussion at Performance Studeis international #13) have noted this curious structure.

performance, Kaprow had presented him and his fellow viewers with the opportunity to participate and help to shape what we now think of as *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*.

A Participatory Environment

While *18 Happenings* has become Kaprow's most famous work and while it introduced a fascinating perspective upon spectatorial engagement within a performance, the work was not able to integrate its audience as participants whose engagement went beyond bodily presence and the witnessing of those actions undertaken by the performance's artists. Despite both the pre-performance publicity and the performance programme intimating the potential for the audience to take an active role within the artwork, *18 Happenings* failed to deliver on its promises. The work's immersive environment and the partiality of the viewer's experience might have obscured the fact, but Kaprow's project essentially re-iterated the conventional separation between active, creative performers and passive, spectators. Indeed, a similar presentational format was evident in several of Kaprow's subsequent Happenings, including 1960's *The Big Laugh* and *Coca-Cola, Shirley Cannonball?, A Spring Happening* (1961) and both of 1962's *Chicken* and *Courtyard*. In each case, the works were not designed to invite participation but as audacious spectacles. Kaprow's interest in participation, however, did not cease during this period; within the concurrent Environments, the subject continued to germinate. Through projects such as *Yard*, *Words* and *Apple Shrine*, Kaprow explored a range of spatial/temporal scenarios that permitted audience interaction and alteration. In these works, Kaprow offered the viewer a range of choices that subtly or substantially changed the work. The implicit choices integrated within the experiential structure of

these Environments, moreover, anticipated the more forthright performative suggestions and directives that Kaprow would develop a few years later for the project *Self-Service*.

Because it is a protention that points towards one of Kaprow's future breakthroughs, *Apple Shrine* bears closer examination. Even as it intimated increasingly participatory artforms, Kaprow's then recent experiments with immersive installations and to some extent *18 Happenings'* multi-chambered structure were obvious retentions, although the audience's movements were no longer strictly governed. Kaprow devised *Apple Shrine* for the Judson Gallery, located in the basement of the Judson Church. The Environment consisted of a labyrinth of chicken wire, tar paper, straw, cardboard and crumpled newspapers (Kelley, *Childsplay* 52-3). Viewers navigated through this mass of material to reach an "inner sanctum, a private chapel of sorts" (Schimmel 17), where they discovered a dimly lit three-tiered "alter." Attached to this alter were a selection of fresh apples and "their plastic, paint-splattered imitations" (Kelley, *Childsplay* 53). The immersive Environment, rather than echoing the open experiential space of the Hansa gallery projects, was the "setting for the enactment of certain choices" (53). As a "place that invited participation" (Kelley 53), Kaprow placed the onus on the viewer to decide how to respond to his invitation: whether to succumb to temptation and pick an apple, and (if one gave in to this urge) whether to choose the real apple or the fake. To make a choice between the real and the fake fruit within the dim space, the "viewer" had to touch the fruit, assessing its surface texture and palpability, smelling it to determine whether its odour was fresh and natural, or reeked of paint. Perhaps some viewers even tried to taste the fruit (Kelley 55). The transitory pleasure of consuming the genuine fruit, though, must be contrasted with the enduring benefit of selecting an "imitation" apple, ultimately

“‘collecting’ an Allan Kaprow ‘original’” (Kelley 55). Challenging the viewer’s decision-making capacity, *Apple Shrine* offered the viewer a profound opportunity for self-knowledge and a definite role to play within the performative installation. With this act couched as a moral decision, Kaprow pressured the viewer to take responsibility for the work: whether they embraced the authentic apple or its plastic replica, this decision represented an initial though brief moment of participation.

While Kaprow was to state it that “Its life is a present one, and only memory can carry it into the future” (“Kaprow’s ‘Apple’”132), the threat that *Apple Shrine*’s ephemeral nature represented to the example of its precedent proved to be problematic. To hedge his bets that the memory of the work would be accessible to a second, spatially and temporally indeterminate audience, Kaprow’s next avant-garde gesture was to submit the review “Kaprow’s ‘Apple Shrine’” under a pseudonym for publication in *The Village Voice*. While such an act might bring up the question of Kaprow’s integrity, Paul Schimmel saw this textual performance as “consistent with his bifurcated role as both thinker and objectmaker” (Schimmel 18) and concluded that Kaprow and his contemporaries realized that “the only sure way to place their work in the historical record was by their own hands” (18). Indeed, “Kaprow’s ‘Apple Shrine’” seems as much manifesto as review, and like the impassioned and insightful self-definitions of the Italian Futurists or the Surrealists, the brief article attempts to make distinct the innovative perspectives materialized within the work of art. While this particular writerly performance was interjected into the cultural field under a pseudonym, Kaprow’s perspectives were soon sought after and were published widely under his own name. As

the 1960s unfolded Kaprow openly assumed the role of spokesperson for the Happenings and his writings appeared in such publications as *Art News*, *Artforum* and *Arts Magazine*.

Perhaps the most important early articulation of the Happenings' theoretical and historical implications was Kaprow's 1961 article for *Art News*. In "Happenings in the New York Scene," Kaprow focused upon those works he felt "to be the most adventuresome, fruitfully open to applications, and the most challenging of any art in the air at the present" (Kaprow, "Happenings"16). To acknowledge the practice's historical debts, Kaprow pointed towards the European avant-garde, and to "the circus, carnivals...medieval mystery plays and processions" (16) as forms of collective creativity that attempted to integrate a participatory audience. Unlike such historical precedents, Kaprow located the site of art squarely within the accessible flow of everyday life. "Happenings are events that, simply put, happen" (16), Kaprow explained "The form is open-ended and fluid; nothing obvious is sought and therefore nothing is won, except the certainty of a number of occurrences to which we are more than normally attentive" (16-17). While he admitted that the Happenings "are essentially theater pieces" (17), Kaprow contrasted the traditional theater's sites of enactment with those of the Happenings: "[t]he most intense and essential Happenings have been spawned in old lofts, basements, vacant stores, natural surroundings, and the street" (17). This change in presentation context resulted in a change of relationship between the audience and the work of art. In place of the theater's traditional separation of performers from viewers, Kaprow noted that the "very small audiences, or groups of visitors, are commingled in some way with the event, flowing in and among its parts. There is thus no separation of audience and play" (17). This changed dynamic seemed, for Kaprow, to be one of the most challenging aspects of

the Happenings. By shifting the site of the work of art from the theatre/gallery to “[t]he sheer rawness of the out-of-doors or the closeness of dingy city quarters” (18), Happenings promised to locate art within the context of lived experience.

While Kaprow does not explore this connection in depth, he does contrast the Happenings with other advanced art practices (most specifically the dominant New York School) that separated art and life. Unlike other advancements that underscored formal innovation, Kaprow argued that his new art innovatively transformed that which it comes into contact with and made the audience an important element within the work: “melting the surroundings, the artist, the work, and everyone else who comes to it into an elusive, changeable configuration”(18).³³ While the article is sprinkled with evocative hints of what this “elusive, changeable configuration” might be, Kaprow is not particularly specific in his explanation of how this effect occurs. Instead he emphasized the innovative status of the Happenings and despite its paucity of concrete details, the textual performance of “Happenings in the New York Scene” allowed tendrils of influence and insinuations of possibility to seep into the public realm and be disseminated to far-flung audiences. Reading Kaprow’s accounts of the Happenings in early 1962, Adrian Henri and a group of artists and poets presented the first Happenings in Liverpool, England later that year (Henri 98). In this instance Kaprow’s textual invitation to participate attracted the “notice” of an unanticipated audience and very quickly transformed that audience into participants. Recuperating Kaprow’s example, Henri and his collaborators were able to access the Happenings as a medium that they could deploy to experience the

³³ Johanna Drucker has noted that the Happenings of the 1958-1961 era seem to be an art form “without object, that is, without either a preconceived goal or a resulting product” (52). The implicit objective of Kaprow’s work, however, would seem to be this “elusive, changeable configuration” that absorbs the audience into the work of art.

sort of creativity and authorship that Kaprow and his colleagues had initiated. This model of retrieval, revision and reuse points towards the idea and practice of Fluid Authority and how it makes creative experiences available to its audiences.³⁴

“Out” and Performance Reluctance

It is unlikely that Kaprow was aware of Henri’s Liverpool Happening and how this one particular audience embraced the opportunity for participation. Likely Kaprow’s attentions were elsewhere as he increasingly had to account for unpredictable audiences and the difficulty of presenting Happenings without the luxury of proper preparation. After defining New York City as the prime locale of the Happenings, Kaprow increasingly worked outside of the New York art scene. Invitations to lecture in college and university art departments flooded in as his prestige increased, as did opportunities to present Happenings internationally. By 1963, Jeff Kelley reports, “Kaprow’s reputation as the father of Happenings, while a simplification, was...established” (87). The problem with fulfilling these requests was that Kaprow no longer had the opportunity to prepare his Happenings as he previously had and he initially struggled to find a methodology that was effective. The difficulty of this translation is evident in Kaprow’s account of his appearance at “The Theater of the Future” conference, held in conjunction with the Edinburgh International Arts Festival. Published in *The New York Times* and bearing the title, “An Artist’s Story of a ‘Happening,’” the article’s sub-title nicely sums up its

³⁴ The retention and accessibility of past creative art exemplars, and the way they are re-configured as a creative medium, will be discussed at length in chapters 4 and 5.

contents: “An Avant-Garde Event Puzzles, Annoys, and Pleases a Few.”³⁵ As Kaprow’s previous “Happenings in the New York Scene” had not dealt extensively with the role of the viewer in the Happenings, “An Artist’s Story of a ‘Happening’” brought the issue of participation back to the forefront. While the *New York Times* provided a fascinating context for the promotion of his ideas, Kaprow’s article revealed that his participation at the conference was not entirely welcome. Recounting his experiences, Kaprow noted the tension between himself and a number of theater scholars who “felt that [he] did not belong there” (145). Arguing that the “theatrical” extends beyond “the stage play,” Kaprow offered the Happening as a type of theater whose “place is anywhere *except* the stage,”³⁶ an assertion that the majority of the conference participants “found unacceptable” (145).

To illustrate the sort of events that Happenings could be, the conference organizers had invited Kaprow to present one and he quickly devised *Out*, a ritualistic piece designed to close the conference. To solicit involvement in the work, Kaprow used an approach he had recently developed. Instead of securing the assistance of friends and fellow artists to serve as performers and rehearsing the piece beforehand, Kaprow verbally introduced the Happening’s ideas and responsibilities to prospective participants just prior to the performance. As part of a procession out of the conference hall and into an adjacent courtyard, the participants progressed along a trail defined by crowd-control

³⁵ The short blurb introducing the text also gives a good indication of the mass-media’s perception of both the emerging practice and artist: “Happenings are a manifestation of a new art form groping to define itself and presently occupying a twilight zone between theater and the plastic arts. Here is an account of a recent happening by a leading New York practitioner” (qtd. in Kaprow, “An Artist’s” 145).

³⁶ Kaprow’s emphasis.

fencing and “paved” with rubber automobile tires. Accompanied by monotonous rhythms pounded out on oil drums, the participants circled the enclosed courtyard like prisoners in a penitentiary yard.³⁷ Intended to accommodate the participation of both the conference delegates and the general public, Kaprow reported that, “many of the delegates refused to participate and went upstairs to watch in safety from a window” (145). *Out*’s polarizing effect upon its audience and the distinct split it caused between those acting as spectators and those engaged as participants may have occurred along traditionalist and innovationist lines, but it seems likely that the conditions of Kaprow’s invitation deserve some of the blame. Delivered just before the participatory opportunity, the invitation did not allow the potential participant much chance to make an informed choice. While Kaprow’s offer might be seen as a challenge to conventional responses and audience behaviours, it was an awkward challenge, more like a nervy dare than an intellectual enticement. While he might not have anticipated the problem of refusal or accounted for those audience members that declined his offer in Edinburgh, Kaprow’s subsequent projects addressed this problem of choice and allowed his prospective participants to make an informed decision about their engagement.

A Happening, for Participants Only

The following year, Kaprow devised a work that seems particularly informed by the *Out* experience. Aimed directly at its eventual participants and designed specifically to negate the audience, *Birds* was “A Happening, for participants only.” Invited to present

³⁷ Describing *Out*’s development, Kaprow recalled the effect of the space and how it initiated a chain of allusions: “my initial source was a half-conscious memory that the courtyard triggered, of a painting by Van Gogh of men marching hopelessly in a circle around a prison yard” (Kaprow 1963: 145).

a work on the campus of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Kaprow drafted *Birds* in January 1964. The two-page, typewritten score included an explanation of the setting, five sets of performance instructions and below the title the designation, “A Happening, for participants only.” In terse, one-sentence descriptions of actions, such as “Wall men build wall of rocks on edge of bridge,” “Tree women drop furniture,” and “Bread man resumes hawking” (*Birds* score 165), Kaprow economically developed a succession of ritualistic interactions that enacted a series of gender stereotypes. The brief script was posted to his hosting institution beforehand and used as a means of attracting prospective participants. Once at the University, Kaprow had the opportunity to discuss the work and flesh out its specifics in dialogue with those individuals intrigued by the chance to experience the Happening as a participant. The intimate event involved roughly one dozen of the University’s students and faculty, and as Jeff Kelley notes it “was the first Happening that truly involved no spectators” (Kelley, *Childsplay* 96).

Kaprow’s desire to eliminate the audience while attracting only committed contributors might have been spurred by his recent Edinburgh experience. It was, however, implicit as early as his Pollock article, even though the transformation of the viewer to the status of participant had proven elusive. Where *Out* attracted a large number of collaborators through immediate verbal explanation, that approach divided the ranks of his audience and created a class of spectators that declined to engage as participants within the Happening. Such mitigating factors as the specialized audience and a less than ideal context contributed to part of this dilemma, but the lack of time to consider the invitation and the speed with which the invitee was required to make a decision were also important factors. *Birds*, in contrast, established some important

methodological mechanisms for Kaprow. First it identified the importance of an informed audience—by inviting Kaprow to present his work, the hosting institution designated itself as a willing participant within the project. The institution, as well, provided access to a specialized audience that might desire the sort of participatory experiences that Kaprow offered—in the case of *Birds*, art students and faculty with an interest in the expression of culture. Second, it established a method for inviting the audience's participation—a solicitation that began with the circulation of the score prior to his arrival and allowed for the audience to consider the responsibilities and benefits of participation without the pressure of immediate response. The mailed score, once circulated, might inspire the enthusiasm to take part or conversely discourage those unwilling to participate. Unlike *Out*'s public playing out of the invitation and uneasy refusal, *Birds*' prospective audience had the opportunity to determine their response in private. Those deciding to become collaborators in the event had some pre-knowledge of what was required. The score, a concise document that could be easily read and remembered, was part of a pre-preparation period that was then followed-up with the artist's in-person verbal elaborations and clarifications that took place just prior to the Happening's performance.

Performance by Order

The importance of Kaprow's development of this score-based performance format is evident in "A Statement," one of the texts collected by Michael Kirby in the important *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (1965). The volume is an intriguing document of its time, featuring a lengthy scholarly essay by Kirby that introduced the practice and

theory of Happenings and extensive sections featuring the art form's most important practitioners.³⁸ Following his introduction, Kirby opened the "artists" section of the book with Kaprow's work, and Kaprow's statement retraced the development of the Happenings, from action-painting to action-collage, through Assemblage and the Environments, to the "form" that had caught the public's attention. Kaprow reported that this interest caused a flurry of invitations to present Happenings for a variety of "universities, museums and civic groups" (Kaprow "Statement," 48). Trying to fulfill these requests led Kaprow to re-think his approach and alter how he structured his Happenings. Accustomed to working in the New York scene, with the assistance of collaborators that he knew and with sufficient time to develop and refine his performances, the overwhelming invitations severely restricted his preparation, causing him "to find a method to do a performance without rehearsal—to make use of available people on the spot as quickly as possible" (49). This necessity led Kaprow to "the development of new techniques, new forms, and new thoughts about my whole purpose" (49). Identifying simple situations and common actions as the key, Kaprow used these to construct concise events that could be articulated within brief scores; these scores could then be easily circulated to solicit the participation of potential collaborators. Summing up this new methodology, Kaprow stated:

Written down on a sheet of paper sent in advance, these actions

³⁸ From Kirby's perspective "Happenings, like musicals and plays, are a form of theatre" (Kirby 11). Thus, within the sections devoted to each artist, Kirby archives the "scripts" of performances, documentary photos and his own detailed account of the selected "productions." The book's other subjects included Robert Whitman, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg and Red Grooms.

could be learned by anyone. Those who wished to participate could decide for themselves. Thus, when I arrived shortly before the scheduled event, I already had a committed group, and then I could discuss the deeper implications of the Happening with them as well as the details of the performance. This has proven to be an efficient and workable method. (49)

Developed out of necessity, Kaprow's later Happenings turned away from the precision of his earliest performative projects. Instead of requiring the rigorously rehearsed activities of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Kaprow's work of the mid-1960s focused upon commonplace and accessible actions whose interest arose through the indeterminate and unpredictable enactment of his participants. "The more 'unartistic' they are," Kaprow pointed out, "the more natural and easy to do and the less they seem inhibiting to performers. Activities...so 'ordinary' they disguise the radical nature of the art form evolving" (49). By returning to the commonplace and the ordinary, Kaprow re-engaged with the everyday materials that had been prime attributes of his earlier Environments. While there were performance elements derived and elaborated from the everyday within Kaprow's earlier Happenings, the importance of these facets of the work were often subservient to the avant-garde context—the radical re-consideration of what constituted a work of art and an innovative re-thinking of the role of the audience. With the "Happenings for participants only" that Kaprow focused upon during the mid-1960s, the everyday became the site and the subject of "radical" creative exploration, one that simultaneously challenged and invited the audience to become participants. Entering what Adrian Henri termed his "mature style" (94), Kaprow began in earnest to explore a

truly participatory artform. He seemed aware of this change in focus within his work, and even distanced himself from his earlier explorations. Regarding the anthologized work, Kaprow made a clear distinction between his new and his past working methods: “None of the works included in the book is my most recent. Now I send a scenario in the mail to potential participants and discuss the various levels of meaning in my works beforehand” (Kaprow, “Statement” 51). Such a two-stage method of inviting the participants’ efforts more clearly defined the responsibilities implicit in the performance and illustrated how the individual audience member might fulfill a role within the work of art. Such distinctions and the orderly presentation suggest that the Happenings were not strictly the chaotic and “anything goes” performances that they were often made out to be.

Even as he explained his then current methods, however, Kaprow was already looking towards further innovations: “[I]deally it should be possible to do a mail-order Happening” (52). While the logistics were daunting and he worried about who might take on the responsibility of being “in charge,” this possibility intrigued Kaprow and he speculated upon a time when “some man from Oshkosh, ordering a Happening through a Sears, Roebuck catalog, could set the whole thing into motion and play a part too, just as I now do” (52). Kaprow, looking forward, concluded his statement by claiming that, “I am now working on ways to make this possible” (52). A clear protention of the do-it-yourself ethic that would come into prominence in the 1990s and into the 21st century, Kaprow’s mail-order scheme was never realized as he described it in “A Statement.” His interest in developing such a dissemination method illustrates a marked change in what he perceived an audience to be: instead of mailing out invitations to the leading figures of the New York scene as we saw with *18 Happenings*, Kaprow anticipated an incredibly

dispersed audience requesting Happenings that he could satisfy via the mail.³⁹ Instead of needing to be a part of the performance, the artist could provide a template and the “man from Oshkosh” could be responsible for fulfilling the duty of performance. The challenge of presenting Happenings across the United States and internationally in the previous few years had compelled Kaprow to re-think the artform and devise innovative methods for eliminating spectatorship through inviting participation. In working through this problem he retained the promising and dispensed with the extraneous, developing a dispersed form of creative activity that could be enacted anywhere and by anyone. Instead of yielding an archive of durable images or objects readily identifiable as art, the Happenings were inclined to produce provocative experiences and transient memories. As an idea transmitted as written directive, the location and duration of the experiences became unpredictable; rather than being sanctioned by a temporal frame or specific site such as the New York Scene circa 1963, Kaprow’s “Statement” predicted an effusive art form, one spreading in unforeseen directions and with the potential for unfathomable iterations.

Self-Service rehearsed this very structure and explored how participatory activities might be as “available” as the imagined mail-order scenario. Conceived to unfold from June to September 1966 and occur simultaneously in New York, Boston and Los Angeles, *Self-Service* offered lists of “available Activities” to prospective participants in each city. Instead of bringing together participants as a group for an alleged shared experience (as was the case with the earlier *18 Happenings*) *Self-Service* dispersed the creative experience over a vast field of possibility and negated any sense that the

³⁹ It is worth comparing Kaprow’s conclusions to the contemporaneous example of the Fluxus Mail-Order Warehouse.

participants formed a coherent community. Providing only the most fragmentary and evocative information, Kaprow invited New Yorkers to locate “An empty house,” wherein “Nails are hammered halfway into all surfaces of rooms,” after which the “house is locked, hammers go away” (182). Participants in both Boston and Los Angeles could decide to “tie tarpaper around many cars in supermarket lot” (182). Within the thirty-odd scenarios (Kelley, *Childsplay*109) Kaprow declined to provide exacting directions or strict requirements; the open scenarios set a cognitive possibility in place and required the participant’s interpretative intervention to materialize the suggested performance. In contrast to the large-scale group Happenings, several of the available activities were designed as solitary undertakings requiring only a single participant. Kaprow absented himself after defining the possibility of the activity—provided with the scenario’s rudimentary requirements, participants were challenged to creatively elaborate upon the score’s possibilities. By deciding what sort of cars merited tar-papering, the number of cars to be tied, and most importantly, when to terminate the activity, the participant took creative responsibility for the work and experienced the decision-making that fulfills the possibilities inherent in any creative idea. Granting the participant a range of choices much broader than with the earlier Happenings or Environments, Kaprow finally developed a method that allowed the audience to become both participant and collaborator, vital for the work’s completion.

Self-Service’s open structure promoted a particularly creative form of engagement, though the work’s lack of limits seems to compromise attempts to gage its impact or fully understand its scope. Spread out over several months and throughout three major urban centres, the work as an entity dissipates even as one tries to imagine how it

might have worked. Only negligible records of how the assigned activities were completed exist, making it impossible to imagine the range of invention undertaken by the participants, or even to verify that the claimed events took place. Leaving behind little trace, *Self-Service* seems on the order of a mental residue and recalls Kaprow's earlier observation regarding *Apple Shrine*: "Its life is a present one, and only memory can carry it into the future."

Kaprow's Environments and Happenings rehearsed the possibilities of implicit participation that are now the identifying feature of much contemporary relational and situational art practice; the example of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, however, seems to obscure the contribution of his other works to the development of participatory spectatorship. Although *18 Happenings* was an important step towards integrating the audience into the work of art, that goal was only realized when Kaprow discovered the method of devising "Happenings, for participants only." *Self-Service*'s expansion of this perspective, where the participant took sole responsibility for the execution of the work in Kaprow's absence, established a creative template that would be retained and refined throughout the rest of his career as an artist. While this initial iteration did not generate much critical appraisal when initially introduced into the cultural field, *Self-Service*'s "instructional" basis informed Kaprow as he turned away from the large-scale public undertakings that were the Happenings and became more interested in exploring the more intimate and private works that would become known as the "Activities." Despite such unpromising beginnings the participatory forum evident in *Self-Service* persists, its echoes and retentions are evident in the open-ended and indeterminate structures of relational art practices. Most specifically the example of Kaprow's work lingers in such

assignment-based creative practices of *Learning to Love You More* (Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July) and *Imaginary Ordinary*. Whether or not such apparent echoes are conscious or unconscious is difficult to determine, and while the recuperation, revision and reapplication of past creative practices are vital aspects of Fluid Authority, re-visiting past works has its hazards, as we shall see in the next chapter. The linkage between recent and distanced works is important and many of Kaprow's creative gestures, such as *Apple Shrine*, the "Happenings for participants only" and *Self-Service* established the possibility of inviting the audience to become participants within the creative forum of art. Together such works and the creative perspectives that initially identified their viability form the legacy of Allan Kaprow, one that prefigured and pointed towards the participatory art practices that have risen to prominence in the decades bracketing the millennium.

Chapter 3: “To Reignite Civic and Cultural Activism”:

Re-doing *18 Happening in 6 Parts*

under Institutional Authority

The past chapter’s focus upon Allan Kaprow brought to the forefront a number of techniques that he developed for inviting audience participation and that I suggested might allow audiences to access creative experiences. Likewise, I suggested that such techniques were not simply creative templates of their time, but also evident within current creative practice and in the contemporary resurgence of interest in participatory art. The process that allows contemporary artists to access works of the past is one that I earlier called “recuperation” and it is a method that I argue utilizes previous artworks as a medium within participatory art practices that invite the audience to explore creative authorship. Although recuperation is essential to Fluid Authority’s participatory art agenda and I am fascinated when I come across examples of it as a creative engagement, it is not an infallible method of revisiting and reviving past works of art. Indeed, accessing the lingering values and retrievable examples of past creative engagement may be compromised by conflicting agendas and questionable motivations. Having emphasized how Kaprow’s legacy provided a particularly fertile repertoire of creative examples, I examine an intriguing but problematic recuperation of one of his signature creative gestures. Focusing upon the 2007 project, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts (Re-doing)*, the chapter demonstrates how past performance art gestures may be claimed by “branded” organizations and institutions, such as RoseLee Goldberg’s Performa Festival

of New Visual Art Performance, New York University's Department of Performance Studies, and Performance Studies international (PSi).

As my own scholarly and creative project is greatly informed by the example of Kaprow's work and the process of recuperation, I was intrigued by the *Re-doing* project when I first learned of it and was thrilled that I had the opportunity to view the work when I visited New York to participate in the conference convened by Performance Studies international. As a new member of PSi and as a first-time participant at its conference, I began to question how the presenting institutions seemed to position the project to stake a claim upon the cultural cutting-edge in perpetuity. As with the example of Relational Aesthetics discussed in Chapter One, the *Re-doing* project seemed to offer the potential for participatory performance yet that opportunity was compromised by other desires and expediencies. Within Goldberg's curatorial vision, Kaprow's work was re-framed as an exemplar that could be invoked "to reignite civic and cultural activism, to bestow community once more on a congregation of artists from diverse disciplines whose sensibilities, imagination and creative drive need points of connection to survive and flourish" (*Performa* 14). At the same time, the *Re-doing*'s leader André Lepecki, a faculty member of Performance Studies at NYU, re-articulated Kaprow's work as one of "absolute contemporaneity," suggesting that the work has achieved the timelessness relevance of a classic. In light of such claims it is worth investigating how the resurrection of a work such as *18 Happenings* engenders civic participation within a decidedly institutional context. Likewise, it is worth considering whether Kaprow's work instead served to re-validate the avant-garde heritage that NYU's Performance Studies department was initially founded upon and which influenced the development of PSi's

post-disciplinary brand. While Goldberg's aim is laudable and Lepecki's claim intriguing, I question the suitability of Kaprow's signature avant-garde gesture to fulfill such functions.

Informing this chapter is Don Thompson's articulation of "branding" within the cultural field. Echoing Pierre Bourdieu's definitions of cultural valuation, Thompson considers branding a practice that substitutes the expertise of established authority for individual critical judgment (2) within the negotiation of value. Thompson's view of the "brand" considers "value" as consisting of both economic and symbolic attributes that are collectively conveyed, rather than self-evident qualities. Following Thompson, this chapter tracks how branded cultural and scholarly institutions invoke the "symbolic" capital associated with established cultural innovations to demonstrate their authority. In such circumstances, institutional interest behaves like a financial investment: an institution's scholarly interest acts as a long-term deposit that accrues value over time. Simultaneously, the institution's initial interest stakes a proprietary claim over intellectual territory. "Claiming kinship" (Davis), an institution asserts intellectual and scholarly entitlement to a subject and draws upon this accrued authority as it revisits and re-iterates the basis on which its authority was formerly established. The chapter illustrates this process by tracking the revivification and reification of Kaprow's work by the coterie involved in the *Re-doing* and examines how the status of the Performance "brand" was accessed by Goldberg, Lepecki and institutional "Performance Studies" to claim prominence within the cultural field. In its many incarnations Performance projects a sense of cutting-edge participatory engagement, one that is permanently at the forefront of social and cultural innovation. While re-performance might be marketed as a means

for a greater engagement with an audience or as an altruistic undertaking to enhance the commonweal, it may also be a tool wielded to secure a position within the cultural field.

The Canon and Canonicity

To understand the sort of cultural expertise that gives “branded” individuals and institutions their sense of authority it is worthwhile to consider the “canon” and the process of canonization. Intimating authenticity and exclusivity, the canon is the aggregate of cultural works that seem to best represent the pinnacles of human creative achievement; and while the canon might seem to project a sense of “self-authenticating quality” (May and Metzger 1170), it is worthwhile to consider that canonization is a process of cultural inclusion and exclusion that coalesces through active selection and repression (Guillory 233). The canonical system governing the creative arts and its histories coalesced between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century as traditional religions were waning, nations were forming and culture was beginning to be considered as a secular surrogate for religious faith (McEvelley 15). Institutionally buttressed on the one hand by arts academies and universities in charge of the professional preparation of cultural producers and commentators, and on the other by museological institutions responsible for the preservation and display of cultural artifacts, the Western canon is perhaps most tangible within the museum and, as Steve Edwards notes, “it can be argued that the major museums of the West act as the repositories of the canon” (3). A major museum’s status perpetuates through the successful collection of cultural objects—the museum both conferring prestige upon works through acquisition and gaining prestige from association with those works. To further enhance the mutually validating prestige of

the art object and the institution, museum curators likewise mediate the viewer's experience of artworks by organizing museological displays to highlight narrative relationships and interpretive possibilities.⁴⁰

Performance Studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett illustrated this impulse to “textualize” objects by reviewing the curatorial policies established by George Brown Goode, director of the U.S. National Museum. In Goode's view, museums were educational institutions with a responsibility to teach “by means of object lessons.” The curator, rather than trusting that the objects in question might be able to tell their own stories, inscribed cultural exemplars within “an intelligent train of thought” (qtd. in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 31). The considered grouping of cultural objects not only enabled the communicability of the objects, but also illustrated the curator's organizing principles and guiding concepts (31). While Kirshenblatt-Gimblett focused upon the didactic potential of curatorial practice within ethnographic museums, the example of the “object lesson” and the contextualization of an object within “an intelligent train of thought” are imaginable outside of the sites dedicated to institutional display of concrete cultural articles. Though the *Re-doing* of Kaprow's work was not presented within a site identified as specifically museological and the work itself could only be contingently recuperated, as we shall see below the implied institutional sanction of the project was palpable, underscoring the various curatorial mandates involved in the undertaking. To serve as a potential object lesson, Kaprow's formerly ephemeral work had to be re-

⁴⁰ For example, the *Nike of Samothrace*, installed at the pinnacle of the Louvre's grand Daru staircase, grants the sculpture the identity of being the pinnacle of Classical Greek sculpture, while the sculpture's location at the heart of the Louvre intimates that Classical precedents were merely precursors to a triumphant French culture.

animated and made tangible as a part of the brand narratives constructed by NYU's Department of Performance Studies, Performance Studies international and the Performa Festival. Before investigating the nuances of how this re-animation occurred, investigating *18 Happenings'* canonical status and how its example might have illustrated each organization's principles, guiding concepts and values is important. To do so, the recuperation of Kaprow's signature avant-garde gesture must be understood in relationship to the enduring value of the historical avant-garde and the extent to which the value of cutting-edge creative agency persists in its delayed efficacy and retrievable example.

The Historical Avant-garde

While the canon of Western creative art might seem the antithesis of avant-garde practice and at times was the very target of avant-garde operations, paradoxically in the past century avant-gardism has been the main avenue for achieving canonization. Although the various avant-gardes that rhizomatically dot history never formed a homogenous program that featured consistent goals or uniform practices, the avant-garde consistently positioned itself on the "cutting edge" of creativity and social renewal (Berghaus 17), a tendency that proved advantageous for asserting creative precedents and launching the innovative practices. Whether tradition, bourgeois society, good taste, the art academy or art itself were the target of critique and attack, what the avant-gardes hoped to achieve in terms of social innovation varied widely depending upon specific cultural, geographical and historical situations. Despite the wide variance in avant-garde aspirations and efficacy the practice proved of great canonical relevance.

Initially a European phenomenon, the avant-gardes could be seen as a product of modernity's formation of individual subjectivity (Staniszewski 102). Arising in the wake of the French revolution and as individual rights expanded, this subjectivity permitted greater individual self-determination; artistic production (once requiring the commissioning of church and crown and practiced under the sanction of academies and guilds) became a matter of choice where individual artists could create as they saw fit and attempt to introduce these creative products into the economic market (102, 104). Within this indefinite zone between being subject to the benedictions of the ruling elite and to the whims of the capitalist market, the avant-gardes began to question art's function in society. Responding negatively to the market's influence upon creative production, some avant-gardists argued for art as an autonomous field separate from the greater bourgeois society and developed the "art-for-art's sake" model that hoped to focus upon purely aesthetic creative motives. On the other side of this argument were the avant-gardes that desired a greater integration of art into everyday life practice. While this schism informs much of the avant-garde creative practice that occurred from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth-century (including the practices of Impressionism, Italian and Russian Futurism, Dada, Surrealism and the Situationist International), the avant-garde's eternal return to the idea of blurring the line separating art and life is of particular importance to the resurrection of *18 Happenings*.

In one of the earliest major studies of avant-gardism, *The Theory of the Avant-garde*, Renato Poggioli described how the avant-garde perceived itself as a "movement" instead of as a "school." Whereas schools "[presupposed] a master and a method, the criterion of tradition and the principle of authority" (20), Poggioli argued that movements

conceived of culture “as creation” and “as a center of activity and energy” (20).⁴¹ As a movement, the avant-gardes’ broad objective was to transcend “the confines of literature and art and [to extend] to all spheres of cultural and civil life” (18). To pass “beyond the limits of art” (18) the avant-garde used activism and antagonism to challenge prevailing conventions (25-6) within both art and everyday life practice. This idea also informed the work of Peter Bürger, who, in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, argued that the “European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society” (49). While this “attack” introduced alternative creative methods into the cultural sphere, for Bürger these innovations were insignificant in comparison to what was really at stake: “What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men” (sic 49).

Even as he identified its *raison d’être*, Bürger immediately proclaimed the failure of the avant-garde project. Citing the example of the *objet trouvé* (found object or readymade), Bürger pointed out that these “anti-art”⁴² gestures had once held promise, but that they were quickly recognized as works of art rather than as revolutionary social practices (57). Institutionalized as a creative gesture, the readymade did not bridge the gap between art and life, it re-enforced art’s alienation from everyday life praxis (57).

⁴¹ For Poggioli, the school’s purpose was to pass “on to posterity a system to work by, a series of technical secrets endowed with a vitality apparently immune to any change or metamorphosis” (20) and, as such, schools were “pre-eminently static and classical” (20). Because of its tendency to distill its aesthetic practices into doctrines, Poggioli questioned whether the art-for-art’s sake model qualified as an avant-garde “movement,” and he instead equated it with the authority and stasis of the “school” (20).

⁴² Michael Shaw, the translator of Bürger’s treatise, uses “antiart” (57). Following the current North American convention, I use the term in its hyphenated form.

Instead of avant-garde provocations re-acquainting the categories of life and art, their greatest impact was *within* the institution of art:

Although the political intentions of the avant-garde movements (reorganization of the praxis of life through art) were never realized, their impact in the realm of art can hardly be overestimated. Here, the avant-garde does indeed have revolutionary effect, especially because it destroys the traditional concept of the organic work of art and replaces it by another. (59)

Applying Bürger's critical perspective, an avant-garde gesture such as *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was immediately recognized as art instead of as a revolutionary alternative designed to erase the boundary between art and everyday life practice. Despite its failure to transform greater society, *18 Happenings'* greatest influence was within the field of cultural production where its example destabilized "traditional concepts" of the work of art and the work in part established much of the creative terrain that we now associate with installation, performance and relational art practice.

The Delayed Comprehension and Re-enactment of the Avant-garde

While Bürger's disappointment with the avant-garde is palpable throughout his treatise, his acknowledgement of its impact within the cultural field hints at the way that artists might access past creative precedents and why such past precedents might have initially merited canonical consecration. Although the avant-garde's failure as a social movement was bad enough, for Bürger this failure worsened through repetition (Foster 11, 13) as various neo-avant-gardes recuperated earlier avant-garde precedents.

Revisiting the “*avant-garde as art*” (Bürger 58), the neo-avant-gardes focused upon the practice’s “aesthetic” perspective instead of its effects in the social field. While this re-visitation demonstrated for Bürger that the avant-garde opportunity had past, for Hal Foster this recuperative process suggests that avant-gardism remains an active possibility. In *Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Foster identifies two waves of recuperation, one featuring Allan Kaprow, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and a second that featured Daniel Buren and Marcel Broodthaers, to critique Bürger’s negative assessment of neo-avant-garde engagement. Whereas Bürger contended that avant-garde critiques were “*punctual and final*” (Foster’s emphasis 10) and that any repetition of a provocation canceled its initial critique of the institution of art and “invert[ed] this critique into an affirmation” (11) of art’s institutional status, Foster questioned why the efficacy of an avant-garde gesture had to be instantaneous and could not bear repetition. From Foster’s perspective, Bürger’s stipulation placed a premium upon the authenticity and originality (11-13) of avant-garde gestures while it denied the potential productivity of re-deploying these innovations.

Instead of avant-garde gestures being “punctual and final” within a strict cause and effect dynamic (10), Foster argued for a relationship of “anticipation” and “reconstruction” (13) where the avant-garde project is *first comprehended* (15) and understood as a viable plan of action once *enacted by* the neo-avant-garde (20). Whereas the historical avant-gardes had practiced a form of indiscriminate provocation against the whole of bourgeois society, the neo-avant-garde honed the art of incitement and chose much more definite targets. In Foster’s view, the institution of art was not even a subject of critique throughout the historical avant-garde as Bürger had theorized; instead art as an

“institution” was only recognized by the neo-avant-gardes (20). Subsequent to this recognition, the neo-avant-garde re-deployed the historical avant-garde’s provocative strategies to initiate a “specific and deconstructive” (20) critique of the institution of art. By suggesting the productivity of recuperative art gestures, Foster counters Bürger’s emphasis on originality, one that privileged the historical avant-garde’s proprietary position within the field. While Foster granted that the first wave of neo-avant-garde remodeling, explored by Rauschenberg, Johns and Kaprow in the 1950s, might have contributed to avant-garde institutionalization, its re-visitation of the historical avant-garde’s “basic devices” (21) suggest the nascent stirrings of “a Duchamp genre” (21).⁴³ The second movement of neo-avant-garde practice, featuring Broodthaers and Buren, more clearly recognized art’s institutional status and invoked avant-garde strategies to investigate the reification of culture within institutions such as museums and galleries. Instead of the avant-garde failing in its antagonism against the institution of art, for Foster, its impact was merely deferred; its initially inchoate concerns ultimately percolated to the surface within the more focused provocations of what we now call “institutional critique” (24). By linking these creative practices across time, Foster suggested that avant-garde gestures, rather than being “punctual and final,” might be retrievable as the basis of subsequent provocations.⁴⁴ While Bürger’s theory suggested

⁴³ Foster went on to describe this “Duchamp genre” as “a reification not only at odds with his practice but paradoxically in advance of its recognition” (21-24), a statement that infers that the recuperation of Duchamp’s creative strategies contradict the artist’s attempts to elude association with a recognizable creative “signature” and, as we shall see below, one that preceded Duchamp’s canonical acknowledgement.

⁴⁴ In *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Foundation of Post-Modernism*, Thomas McEvilley came to a similar conclusion. Examining the avant-garde’s “anti-art” practices, he surmised that avant-garde artists both positioned themselves “against” dominant art practices, and offered alternatives that could be

that the institution of art had to be liquidated to fulfill its destiny as part of the praxis of life, in Foster's account the canonical avant-garde provided the tools for art's institutional self-critique.

Foster's ideas of "anticipation" and "reconstruction" resemble Alfred Gell's notions of "retension" and "protension," and both ideas suggest how creative gestures are not "punctual and final" but linger and mutate to serve as examples and inspire new applications. The gap between a work of art's initial instantiation and its effects likewise may be delayed and there may be a significant lapse between an action and the canonical recognition of its importance. The delayed stirrings of Foster's "Duchamp genre" and the tardy canonization of Marcel Duchamp is a case in point. An aloof, but important, member of the Dada and Surrealist movements, Duchamp also dabbled in Fauvism and Cubism (McEvelley 18). His most important contribution to creative culture is a repertoire of creative methodologies designed to "put art back in the service of the mind" (qtd. in Camfield 81). Duchamp's trail-blazing experiments with aleatory procedures, readymades, and creation by designation have proven to be incredibly influential practices readily retrievable by subsequent generations of artists. While often narrated as instantaneous and inevitable, Duchamp's recognition by the cultural field was not immediate (Camfield 62) and, as Hal Foster has noted, "The status of Duchamp...is a retroactive effect of the countless artistic responses and critical readings... across the dialogical space-time of avant-garde practice and institutional reception" (8). Gradually

pursued "instead of" prevailing creative conventions (15). McEvelley's notion of an retrievable art returns in Chapter 5.

gaining relevance through re-visitation and re-citation, the value of Duchamp's gestures was eventually confirmed by canonical art history, even though the gap between the initial instantiation and acknowledgement was vast.

The case of *Fountain* illustrates how Duchamp amassed canonical credibility over time. The original object *Fountain* (1917) was one of Duchamp's readymades that began its life as a mass-produced urinal. Inscribed with the pseudonym "R. Mutt," the piece was initially submitted to an open exhibition organized by the Society of Independent Artists, where any artist paying an application fee was to be included in the show. With one audacious gesture Duchamp conjecturally defined the urinal as an art object and performatively tested whether this claim would be validated through the object's exhibition; by effacing his own creative identity as an artist by using a pseudonym, Duchamp challenged the Society to recognize the objects on its own artistic merits. The gesture at once circumvented technical acumen as a pre-requisite for artistic expression, visual pleasure as the determinate of an object's aesthetic worthiness and challenged conventional assumptions about the nature of art. The action both assailed art's autonomous separation from everyday life practice and pointed towards art's conceptual basis. Despite the alleged openness of the exhibition, *Fountain* was rejected and was never even exhibited; its provocative testing of the exhibition's "openness" and subversive conceptual challenge to the cultural field's conventions spread via Alfred Stieglitz's photograph of the work and the account of its controversial rejection, both published in the May 2, 1917 edition of *The Blind Man*. Such implications arose despite the absence of a tangible art object—the original "R. Mutt" inscribed urinal has disappeared (Camfield 13) and its place within the cultural canon is largely based upon

Stieglitz's photographic documentation and the written accounts of Duchamp's performative testing of the limits of art.⁴⁵

Subsequent to its controversial launch into the cultural field, *Fountain* fell out of cultural discourse for nearly thirty years and was “neither reproduced nor discussed in any significant form” (Camfield 62) until the 1940s. Indeed, as Robert Jensen found when researching the later acknowledgement of Duchamp, “Before 1958, Duchamp was barely a participant in the modern canon and his 1912 *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* was a far more likely candidate for serious art historical discussion than his 1917 *Fountain*” (29). The eventual recuperation of *Fountain* and the absorption of Duchamp into the canon did not begin until his first American retrospective exhibition in 1963, when he was 75 years old (McEvelley 30). Recognizing the persisting potential of the readymade and Duchamp's emphasis upon ideas over aesthetics, the “Duchamp genre” spread as minimal and conceptual artists in the 1960s plotted their course following Duchamp's lead. As William Camfield claimed, “the burgeoning interest in Duchamp [in the 1960s] coincided with exhilarating developments in avant-garde art, virtually all of which exhibited links of some sort to Duchamp” (88). The success of his ideas the second time around required a re-consideration of Duchamp's status within the narrative of art history. “Since the 1960s,” Jensen concluded, “no twentieth century artwork has been the object of more serious discussion, both art historical and philosophical, than the *Fountain*....*Fountain* demonstrates how objects can acquire meaning and indeed fundamental importance over time” (29). Jensen's claim was bolstered by a 2004 poll of

⁴⁵ A handful of replicas that Duchamp had made in the 1950s and 1960s are now consecrated in several major museums (Demos 27; Staniszewski 29), while miniaturized *Fountains* enjoy places of prominence within Duchamp's self-curated retrospective “portable museum” (Demos 1), *La boîte-en-valise*.

500 “art experts” that determined that *Fountain* was the “most influential modern art work of all time.”⁴⁶ What the poll elides is the precise cause of this interest in *Fountain*—was it aroused by a yearning for a missing art object or by the retrievable example of Duchamp’s performative testing of art’s boundaries? The tardy comprehension of Duchamp’s creative gestures and their eventual re-enactment throughout conceptually-informed art practice suggests that the effects of the readymade were not “punctual and final,” but accreted over time. Each recuperation and revision, then, contributed to *Fountain*’s eventual recognition as a “foundational” gesture that forwarded the indeterminate and conflicted agenda of the avant-garde.

Kaprow’s Recuperative Precedent

Foster’s formation of recuperative avant-garde practice stipulates that a neo-avant-garde comprehends both the avant-garde’s critical agenda and the institution of art, and subsequently re-applies the initial example as a form of institutional critique. It is worth considering the extent of this delayed institutional critique when an artist begins to revisit and revive his or her own past works. In the case of Allan Kaprow, re-visitation and re-deployment occurred within the context of his own creative practice and in collaboration with cultural and educational institutions. Institutional interest in this collaboration occurred, in part, because of the acclaim and prestige that Kaprow had

⁴⁶ A BBC on-line report publicized this survey under the title, *Duchamp's urinal tops art survey*, declining to address the work as *Fountain* in both the article’s title and in the subtitle. One of the experts apparently involved in the survey, Simon Wilson, noted, “The choice of Duchamp’s *Fountain* as the most influential work of modern art ahead of works by Picasso and Matisse comes as a bit of a shock....But it reflects the dynamic nature of art today and the idea that the creative process that goes into a work of art is the most important thing—the work itself can be made of anything and can take any form” (n.p.).

amassed. By 1974, in *Total Art: Environments, Happenings, and Performance*, Adrian Henri referred to Kaprow as the “central figure in the rise of happenings, and the main authority on the way in which it evolved out of [its] environment” (90). In his role as the “main authority” of the Happenings, Kaprow himself set the precedent for the 2007 re-doing of his *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. As suggested in Chapter Two, once Kaprow expanded his practice beyond the New York scene, it became increasingly institutionalized. Invited by universities, art colleges and museums to discuss the innovative creative practice of the Happenings, Kaprow negotiated the performance of new works as part of his contract (Kelley, *Childsplay* 88-92). Working through commission (Henri 94), Kaprow depended upon hosting organizations to provide opportunities to pursue his artistic practice, ironically suggesting the importance of institutional support to an avant-garde artist. Unfortunately, this relationship eventually caused Kaprow a great deal of tension. Rather than wanting to present his latest ideas and freshest investigations, Kaprow’s institutional hosts pressured him to reprise the Happenings that constituted the basis of his fame. As Jeff Kelley observed in *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow*: “One of the conditions of being a famous artist and getting older is that one’s audience begins requesting—Kaprow would say ‘demanding’—an account of one’s past, especially if that past, which amounts to art history, cannot be otherwise accounted for by conventional objects of art” (223). Accounting for his past and “[meeting] these requests without simply restaging previous works became Kaprow’s creative dilemma of the 1990s” (217).

Attracted by the accrued cultural status of the earliest works, these institutional appeals contravened Kaprow’s own conception of his Happenings. As early as 1961, he

described the Happenings as an ephemeral practice: “The final point I should like to make about Happenings...is implicit in all the discussion—their impermanence. Composed so that a premium is placed on the unforeseen, a Happening cannot be reproduced” (*Essays* 20). Despite setting this standard, Kaprow reconciled himself to his predicament and devised a way of fulfilling the commissions and his own need to continue to develop his performance practice: “Wanting to continue enacting his works in the present, he resisted restaging what would amount to a selection of his ‘greatest hits.’ Instead, he began offering sponsors ‘reinventions’ of previous environments and Happenings” (Kelley, *Childsplay* 217). As he reinvented these past works Kaprow freely altered and revised many of the projects’ physical aspects but retained the earlier works’ core metaphors, a strategy that provided the reinventions’ audiences with an experience that differed greatly from that of the initial audience (218). Working with an established past, Kaprow’s reinventions created a tension between the artist’s own memory and the collective memory preserved by canonical art history. Jeff Kelley observed:

Much of the poignancy of Kaprow’s reworkings lies in their capacity to mark the passage of time as well as to suggest the gap between the archival seriousness of art history (as it documents original works of art) and the permissive playfulness of an artist who starts with memory but makes things up, reinventing, as it were, his past. (“Reinventing” n.p.)

As he set the precedent for the institutional re-doing of his work, Kaprow also mapped out how the reinventions might drastically reconfigure his past works as they renovated already established motifs and ideas. The durability and accessibility of these ideas suggest that Kaprow’s performative practices retained a cognitive legitimacy and

resonance long after their initial completion. This resonance was not a constant value. As with Duchamp's *Fountain*, there was a lull between the initial instantiations of the work and sustained institutional interest. Indeed, the question "What ever happened to Allan Kaprow?" was one that Jeff Kelley addressed in both the acknowledgments of his 1993 edited collection of Kaprow's writings, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (ix) and in the introduction to *Childsplay* (2004) (3). In both instances Kelley suggests that Kaprow's interest in ephemeral performance practices had made an important impression within the cultural field, but that the artist's works were in danger of becoming inaccessible and illegible as they became historically remote. In the latter publication, Kelley emphasized the Happenings as part of the "aesthetic liberation" (2) of the 1960s and as "having set the stage" (2) for such hybrid creative practices as installation and performance art. Kelley's motivation for pursuing the project was to contravene the Happenings' status as "myth and art-world rumor" (2). By de-mythologizing the practice and by writing "about them as tangible artworks" (3), Kelley attempted to make the Happenings cognitively accessible and suggest their on-going cultural relevancy. Like the neo-avant-gardes' retrieval of historical avant-garde practice and similarly to conceptual artists' revision of Duchamp's provocative examples, Kelley set the stage for Kaprow's avant-garde project to be "comprehended" and "enacted." As with the cases of Dada and Duchamp, Kelley's retrospective project retrieves past creative examples that had always flirted with cultural illegibility and had persistently challenged the periphery of the cultural field.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Kelley's textual efforts to preserve Kaprow's innovative practices were part of an ongoing undertaking that began in 1988 when Kelley organized *Precedings*, a year-long retrospective at the Center for Research in Contemporary Art at the University of Texas

Despite Kelley's efforts to make Kaprow's work tangible and concrete, almost twenty years later the question "What ever happened to Allan Kaprow?" was echoed by the curatorial team responsible for the major retrospective, *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Conceived by Stephanie Rosenthal, curator at the Haus der Kunst, München, and Eva Meyer-Hermann, guest curator (but formerly Senior Curator) at Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven in 2004, the exhibition was designed to acknowledge "one of the best-known unknown artists" (Meyer-Hermann 73). "Despite his writings and his many years of teaching," Meyer-Hermann stressed, "his is a household name only to fellow artists and art historians" (73). Speculating on this professional predicament, Stephanie Rosenthal pointed towards Kaprow's integrity and asserted that "[he] demanded that art and life should become one, and he remained true to this principle—but the consequence was the disappearance of his art, at least as far as the art market and the wider public were concerned" (57). *Art as Life*, then, developed with an agenda aimed at rectifying Kaprow's persistent marginality within the cultural field. Despite his interest in the undertaking, Kaprow reportedly asserted that "I don't want to have a show" (qtd. in Rosenthal 57). Indeed, Kaprow's reluctant involvement stemmed from the institutional

at Arlington. To initiate the de-mythologization process and once more make Kaprow's ephemeral practices into tangible artworks, Kelley invited Kaprow to revisit his past works. Reinventing no fewer than eight previous projects for presentation in Arlington, Oakland, New York, and along the coast of the Netherlands (*Childsplay* 217-8), Kaprow's participation in *Precedings* culminated with a series of evenings where he practiced "retrospection" and discussed his creative practice in terms of such issues as "The Art/Life Frame" and "The Reinvention of One's Past, and the Transformation of a Present Self" (218). *Precedings* concluded with a one-day scholarly symposium that discussed "Art as Participation" and included Michael Kirby, Lucy Lippard, Suzanne Lacy and Richard Schechner, among others.

tendency to separate art from life, and his on-going efforts to become an “un-artist”:⁴⁸ “To do what I want to do, I had to leave the art world” (Kaprow qtd. in Rosenthal 57). To reflect this concern, the curatorial team quickly rejected the idea of emphasizing his “art-like art” (his early paintings and action-collages) and instead considered ways to make accessible his “lifelike” art.

Privileging performative and experiential practices (the Happenings, the Activities, and the Environments), the retrospective followed Kaprow’s preference for “reinventions” rather than “reenactments” (Rosenthal 61-3). Like the precedent set by Kaprow throughout his later career, the works retained their core metaphors; unlike those earlier reinventions Kaprow was not to be solely responsible for executing the projects and instead invited “others to realize new versions of his work” (Rosenthal 65). Having the example of a work’s core ideas, the reinvention’s “leader” had something to work with and against; whatever choices they made would not only affect the work’s physical and temporal form, but also its interpretation (65). Ironically, this reinvention process emphasized how art and life were intertwined for Kaprow. After rigorously working to blur the distinct boundaries separating these two categories of experience, failing health threatened to end not only Kaprow’s life but also endanger the example of his work. The rationale for developing the reinventions through invitation was influenced by the desire to direct the future consideration of his work and to make clear Kaprow’s wish that the works would continue to be reinvented in the future (Rosenthal 62). As Rosenthal pointed out, Kaprow “was allowing his art to be experienced by a new generation as well as making provisions for his works to live on after his death” (63), but this process

⁴⁸ See “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I” (1971), “Part II” (1972) and “Part III” (1974) in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Pages 97-126 and 130-147.

accentuated for Kaprow that the bond he had established between art and life would be severed with his impending death. “It was impossible for him to think about the reinventions without facing his own mortality” (65), Stephanie Rosenthal stressed, but “Kaprow was gradually disconnecting his life from his work, preparing to allow his works to lead a life of their own, and it was only his acceptance of his own mortality that made this step possible” (65).

While the retrospective’s emphasis upon reinvention points toward the practice’s potential to access the past as a renewable creative medium, Meyer-Hermann and Rosenthal did include one reenactment in *Art as Life*’s itinerary. Following the example of the reinventions, they issued an invitation to André Lepecki to lead the re-creation of Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. An associate professor of Performance Studies at New York University and a practicing dramaturge and stage designer, Lepecki was originally skeptical about the undertaking. Even though his familiarity with the original performance was minimal, he was aware that it was a “groundbreaking work responsible for bringing that felicitous word ‘Happening’ into the vocabulary of twentieth-century performance” (Lepecki, “Redoing” 45-6). Lepecki had also heard that John Cage had disliked the work and that its contemporary critics had questioned the work’s avant-garde innovations; as well, he knew that Kaprow had distanced himself from the work (46). Lepecki was also troubled by Kaprow’s seemingly unequivocal statement that the Happenings were designed to “exist for a single performance, or only a few, and are gone forever as new ones take their place” (Kaprow, *Essays* 16-7). Despite these concerns, “Kaprow’s extraordinarily generous personal consent” (Lepecki, “Re-doing” 46) and his first exposure to the original performance’s archives changed Lepecki’s mind. Instead of

a concise “script,” the performance existed only as an archive of fragmentary preparatory notes. The performance’s complex integration of sound, movement, text and imagery was only hinted at in poetic passages, notations of bodily movements, directions for the integration of sound and projected images, and sketches of timelines that suggested how the performance’s various elements might come together (47). The corpus of some 400 pages provided clues about the form and content of *18 Happenings*, but did not constitute a readily replicable score.

Like Duchamp’s *Fountain*, *18 Happenings* had disappeared as a verifiable object for direct study. In its absence was an archive that contained conjectural elements that did not constitute a concise historical template that might be fulfilled. The state of the archival material could not produce an exact re-production and necessitated an imaginative reconstruction of the work; indeed, Lepecki stressed that the performance could only be recovered in an “anexact” state, that is “not really inexact, but beside or beyond the problem of exactitude” (Lepecki, “Re-doing” 47). In light of this situation and Kaprow’s earlier example of re-invention, Lepecki had the opportunity to drastically revise the work for a distinctly different historical context. Yet, despite the archive’s many gaps and the necessity to creatively respond to what the archive failed to preserve, “exactitude” and fidelity to the archive strangely seemed to take precedent in the “Re-doing.” *18 Happenings*’s original electronic composition, variously described as a “jumble of sounds,” “very compact,” and “pure essences rather than ‘music’ in the conventional sense” (Kaprow qtd. in Lepecki 50), was not part of the archive at Lepecki’s disposal. In its absence, the production team’s sound designer, Shawn Greenlee, was at work on imaginatively reconstructing this score when, in Lepecki’s words, “we got

lucky” (50). The fortuitous turn of events was the discovery of Kaprow’s original tapes, which then served as the basis for the sound used throughout Lepecki’s re-production. The integration of Kaprow’s original sound into the imaginatively reconstructed work illustrates the lingering authority of *18 Happenings*’ initial instantiation over the work’s re-invention.

The Performa Brand: “The Real Stuff” of Recuperative Art

As part of the program for *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*, Lepecki’s project was presented at only at Haus der Kunst, München, but not at the co-sponsoring institution, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Nor did the “Re-doing” appear at the retrospective’s stops at Kunsthalle Bern and Museo d’Arte Contemporanea de Villa Croce, Genoa. When the curators announced that the exhibition would visit the United States, RoseLee Goldberg noticed New York City’s absence from the retrospective’s tour itinerary. Shocked by this oversight, Goldberg decided that Performa 07 would feature several events that staked a claim over Kaprow’s creative legacy:

When I heard that the Kaprow show actually wasn’t going to stop in New York but was going to go Los Angeles, one part of me was just flabbergasted that that could possibly happen, but the next thing I said was, ‘Good, we’ll just do the real stuff, here in New York. We’ll do the performances because after all, what Kaprow did for New York was to turn it upside down and create these events in the city.’ (qtd. in Sandler 132)

Goldberg's authenticity claim—"the real stuff"—privileged the ephemeral performances of the artist over the documentary and archival residue of notes, fragmentary scores and photographs that lent the retrospective exhibition its sense of authenticity. As well, despite Kaprow's negligible creative profile among the general public, Goldberg recognized the value of Kaprow's legacy to "fellow artists and art historians" (Meyer-Hermann 73). Revering Kaprow as a canonical signpost within a performance art lineage that she had articulated through her own scholarly efforts, Goldberg drew upon her own past prestige to re-claim Kaprow as an object of proprietary intellectual knowledge. Remarkably, what such actions overlooked was the extent that the retrospective had re-conceived the "real stuff" of Kaprow's oeuvre and how it had attempted to make the artist's work an accessible participatory experience. Insinuating that Los Angeles was something of an illegitimate heir to the legacy of performance, Goldberg re-affirmed Kaprow's performances as indigenous and integral to New York City, while drawing upon the accrued cultural capital of Kaprow's work to lend prestige to her Performa Festival. Goldberg eventually secured the Lepecki *Re-doing* for Performa, while the work was omitted from the *Art as Life* roster of events at the Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art.

It is worth noting that Performa was able to pull off this coup in time for its second festival. The successful launch of the Performa "brand" and its growing influence within the cultural field may be traced through the personal consecration of Goldberg as the organization's Founding Director and Curator. Goldberg's name, after all, has been synonymous with performance art history since *Performance Art: from Futurism to the Present* was published in 1979. Now in its third edition, the book has become a university

curriculum staple and has been translated into several languages. Goldberg followed up that book with the lavishly illustrated *Performance: Live Art Since 1960* (1998) and a monograph on Laurie Anderson (2000), while contributing regularly to *Artforum* and other periodicals. Additionally, she served as the curator for New York City's influential performance venue, The Kitchen, and continues to be an adjunct faculty member at New York University. Goldberg's own personal engagement in the growth of performance art in New York City, her reputation as one of the creative practice's most important scholars, and her connection to a prestigious institute of higher learning all combine to suggest a sense of experience and connectedness that establishes her authority as a branded participant within the cultural field. Goldberg's personal consecration as a canonical figure may also be traced by the acknowledgement of the cultural field's other participants. The book-jacket blurbs on the back cover of the catalogue commemorating the festival's inaugural year, *Performa: New Visual Art Performance*, feature kudos from a popular critic (*The New York Times*' Roberta Smith), two canonical artists (Marina Abramović and Cindy Sherman) and an influential fellow scholar (Hal Foster), illustrating Goldberg's amassed prestige and the profile that the first festival achieved.⁴⁹

The level of expertise and pedigree projected by the Performa brand allowed it to immediately secure an important place within New York City's cultural life. Goldberg's ambitions for the organization apparently go well beyond the city's five boroughs and in an interview published before the first festival Goldberg posed the rhetorical question, "How to create a world-class biennial from scratch in less than a year?" (qtd. in

⁴⁹ Cindy Sherman's blurb succinctly sums up Goldberg's association with the practice of performance art and her status within the cultural field: "RoseLee Goldberg wrote the book on performance art, so when she organizes a performance biennial, it is not to be missed" (*Performa*, back-cover).

Moulton). The desire “to create a world-class biennial” coincided with the international boom in biennial and triennial art festivals (Seijdel 4) that happened in the early years of the twenty-first century. Founded in 2004 and introduced in its initial 2005 incarnation as a biennial event, Performa followed the lead that made such international art fairs as Documenta, the Venice Biennale and the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art famous. Formerly a means of promoting the political agendas of nation-states, the biennial format presently serves as a marketing vehicle to promote cities and regions as destinations for cultural tourism (Seijdel 4). While biennials have been especially successful in Europe and Asia, the Americas have been slower to embrace the format, and it is within this gap in the North American cultural market that Performa positioned itself. Despite the importance of biennials as marketing tools, Jordine Seijdel has pointed out that they remain something of a politicized format; although they now forsake nationalistic boosterism, biennials currently attempt to provide a forum for critical social issues within their artistic programming (4-5). Paralleling this tendency, and as introduced above, Goldberg indicated that Performa’s goals were “to reignite civic and cultural activism, to bestow community once more on a congregation of artists from diverse disciplines whose sensibilities, imagination and creative drive need points of connection to survive and flourish” (*Performa* 14).

Goldberg’s claim provocatively asserts Performa’s aim to access performance art’s tradition of social engagement and to make the Performa brand not only aesthetically significant but also politically relevant. Performa’s mandate—to explore “the critical role of live performance in the history of twentieth century art and to

[encourage] new directions in performance for the twenty-first century”⁵⁰—also links an acknowledgement of historical precedent with an attempt to map out performance’s future role within a perpetually changing cultural field. While such ideas have their appeal and I do not dispute that performative, relational, dialogical and/or participatory art may fulfill a social function—the first chapter illustrated the fertile (although problematic) intersection of participatory art forms and sociopolitical engagement—the outcome of putting such ideas into action and bringing those goals to fruition is never guaranteed to occur as planned. While the creative context that Goldberg imagines would promise to be fertile ground for participatory art practices seems as though it might be capable of blurring the distinction between artists and audiences, Goldberg seems to infer participation is a privilege for artists only. Paralleling Nancy Spector’s problematic curation of *theanyspacewhatever* exhibition, Goldberg’s assertion that Performa provides a sense of “community” that enables artists to “survive and flourish” seems to overlook the audience as potential participants in the renewal of activism and engagement. As well, envisioning the biennial as a site for socially engaged creative practice would also seem to make engagement an occasional diversion instead of an on-going responsibility.

For Goldberg, 1970s performance art was clearly an important example and resource, one that she claimed “is now history and ripe for excavation” (*Performa* 12). Recognizing performance’s “historical ripeness,” Goldberg made re-staging and re-presenting past performances an important portion of the festival’s programming.⁵¹ Even

⁵⁰ “About Performa” blurb in *18 Happenings in 6 Parts (Re-doing)* performance programme.

⁵¹ The 2005 Performa Festival coincided with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum’s presentation of Marina Abramović’s *Seven Easy Pieces*, a series that revisited and

as she excavated the history of performance art, as a historian and curator Goldberg wondered, “How to restage or re-present events that were made precisely to evade institutional display” (*Performa* 13). Ironically, in the case of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, the answer was with the utmost fidelity to Kaprow’s archive. Instead of highlighting a work that followed Kaprow’s example of “reinvention” and explored the possibility that the revised work might serve as a sociopolitical tool or as a critical lens, *Performa* included a work that seemed a preservationist recuperation. In privileging the “real stuff” of the performance, Goldberg included André Lepecki’s *Re-doing* into *Performa 07*, a reproduction that asserted the archive’s authority—the very same body of documentary evidence that she had brushed off to the museal oblivion of the retrospective exhibition installed at the Los Angeles’ Museum of Contemporary Art. In Goldberg’s view, by revisiting the exemplars of the past, contemporary artists might learn the lessons and mechanisms of social engagement and continue a tradition of positive community involvement. By offering authoritative models for emulation, Goldberg emulated the behaviour of the “schools” that Poggioli had identified as being the antithesis of avant-garde practice. Instead of recuperating the avant-garde’s past examples as the tools of social critique, recuperative acknowledgement seemed the prerequisite for artists to become members of the creative community. As well, Goldberg’s effort to secure Lepecki’s recuperated *18 Happenings* is especially questionable in light of the work’s original problematic notion of participation. As Chapter Two’s discussion of Kaprow’s

recuperated performance works from the 1960s and 1970s. Although the *Performa* catalogue includes a section on *Seven Easy Pieces*, the Guggenheim catalogue does not mention the *Performa Festival*. The 2009 *Performa Festival* celebrated the centennial of Marinetti’s “Futurist Manifesto” and invoked Italian Futurism as the biennial’s organizing principle.

original performance argued, despite participation being an inherent concern of the work, the ways that Kaprow structured the performance circumscribed the audience's opportunities for engagement and interaction. Indeed, as Kaprow continued to search for contexts and structures that permitted a greater degree of audience participation, he moved away from the sort of performance structures explored in *18 Happenings*. So while it may seem as if I dispute in totality Goldberg's recuperation of Kaprow, in actuality it is her choice of tools for social engagement (*18 Happenings*) and the many in which the work is recuperated (an apparent replica) that I question. Many of Kaprow's later Happenings and Activities might have been more productively utilized by Performa to illustrate the idea of social engagement and Kaprow's own method of recuperation, "reinvention" might have illustrated how works of art can be creatively renewed through re-visitation. While Performa 07 also included reinventions of Kaprow's *Fluids* and *Push and Pull*, the festival's promotion of these events paled in comparison to the privileged position afforded Lepecki's *Re-doing*.⁵² Contradicting her stated curatorial vision, Goldberg privileged Kaprow's most famous work over works that might have been more appropriate. Partly nostalgic, partly opportunistic, the Performa brand's re-visitation of the past accessed and exploited the accumulated cultural capital lodged within Kaprow's most canonical avant-garde work.

⁵² As part of a pre-conference registration promotion, a PSi conference delegate could purchase tickets to the *Re-doing* and other featured performances by Isaac Julien and Jerome Bel, and receive a copy of the *Performa* catalogue.

Fidelity to Performance Studies' Avant-garde Legacy

Performa was not the only institution involved in retrieving Lepecki's *Re-doing* for New York City. The work's re-presentation was scheduled to coincide with the 13th Performance Studies international (PSi) conference, *Happening, Performance, Event*, hosted by New York University's Department of Performance Studies. The thirteenth conference was the third PSi annual meeting held at NYU, re-asserting a relationship that began in 1995 when noted scholar Peggy Phelan and graduate students Jill Lane and Amanda Barrett convened the first official performance studies conference at NYU.⁵³ The Department of Performance Studies, thus, has a long and engaged history with Performance Studies international. Of course, the New York University department claims precedence in the field and is often credited with having launched Performance Studies in 1980 when Richard Schechner and Michael Kirby restructured NYU's Graduate Department of Drama as the world's first Department of Performance Studies (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Performance" 44-5; Bial 5), but how the department perceives itself and its academic purpose reveals some of the motivation informing its interest in hosting PSi's thirteenth annual conference and scheduling it to coincide with Performa's second biennial.⁵⁴ In his foundational textbook *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Schechner surmised that "If performance studies were an art, it would be avant-garde" (3). This sentiment was one that was also shared by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who

⁵³ Although Performance Studies international lists this meeting as PSi #1 on its website, that conference preceded the 1997 founding of the organization. PSi's website also idiosyncratically lists an earlier meeting at the 1994 Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference as PSi#2.

⁵⁴ In their opening addresses to the conference, both José E. Muñoz (Chair, NYU Performance Studies) and Adrian Heathfield (PSi's out-going President) suggested that the conference had been moved from its normal summer schedule to November to take advantage of the 2007 Performa biennial.

served as the first chair of NYU's Performance Studies department (Bial 6) and who had likewise claimed "We take our lead from the historical avant-garde and contemporary art" (qtd. in Schechner 3).

In Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's estimation, the avant-garde and contemporary art illustrated for Performance Studies the necessity to blur disciplinary boundaries and subvert aesthetic hierarchies that might privilege one mode of cultural expression over others ("Performance" 43). Regarding the subject area of Performance Studies' interests, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett specifically defined the field as a "postdiscipline of inclusions"(43) that, like other "new knowledge formations (Cultural Studies, Visual Culture, Postcolonial Studies, Gender Studies), ...starts with a set of concerns and objects and ranges widely for what it needs by way of theory and method" (43). In contrast to these other emergent fields of analysis, Performance Studies' focus upon "embodiment, event, and agency" (43) positioned the field as "particularly attuned to issues of place, personhood, cultural citizenship, and equity" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Performance," 51). Also, because Performance Studies was conceived as a "postdiscipline," it eschews the objective distance of traditional scholarship and instead accommodates an activist engagement, where "both artists and scholars, concerned with a wide range of issues" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 51), may work as collaborators with their subjects of study. This particular articulation of Performance Studies⁵⁵ resembles Performa's curatorial agenda designed to re-engage "civic and cultural activism," so that "once more" a sense of

⁵⁵ Surveying the breadth of the field, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's article distinguished three main branches of Performance Studies: the broad spectrum approach (developed at New York University), the aesthetic communication approach (Northwestern University's model) and Ethnoscenology (as introduced at the University of Paris VIII), ("Performance" 43-55).

“community” could be established within the creative field. The 2007 convergence of Performa 07 and PSi #13 thus unfolded upon common ground demarcated by a shared desire for social engagement and amelioration.

As both Schechner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett acknowledge the avant-garde as fundamental to Performance Studies, the re-examination of one of its signature gestures would be of obvious interest. While Goldberg pointed towards civic and activist engagement as the motivations for Performa’s recuperative agenda, the institutional recuperation of Kaprow’s avant-gardist gesture was not enacted as a form of self-critique (as Foster might have imagined with a neo-avant-gardist undertaking) but seemingly to endorse the institution’s role as a caretaker of a cultural legacy. To assert this association, as part of the 13th Performance Studies international conference hosted by the Department that had launched the field, Lepecki and his collaborators presented a panel to explicate their revival of Kaprow’s *18 Happenings*. As I was a delegate at this conference I had the opportunity to attend this panel and was struck by the extent that Lepecki stressed the project’s faithfulness to the wishes of the artist and to the extant remnants of the initial performance. To illustrate the legitimacy of the project, Lepecki’s team emphasized Kaprow’s “blessing” of the *Re-doing*. While Stephanie Rosenthal’s curatorial essay had described the negotiations between Kaprow, herself and Eva Meyer-Hermann as a collaborative effort to make the reinventions and reenactment an important part of the *Art as Life* retrospective, her panel contributions at PSi #13 revealed that the negotiations had been fraught with uncertainty due to Kaprow’s terminal illness.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁶ Rosenthal revealed that there was grave concern that Kaprow might rescind his blessing and the undertaking would have to be abandoned. As Kaprow’s condition worsened, his enthusiasm for the retrospective waned; Rosenthal reported that she had

respect for the artist's wishes (and the fear that those wishes might change) is commendable, but the extent to which the panel asserted the artist's blessing seemed designed to preserve Kaprow's consecration of the project.

While stressing its fidelity to Kaprow's wishes, the *Re-doing's* claim of archival fidelity was problematic. In the absence of a concise script or score, Lepecki and his collaborators explained how they re-constructed the *Re-doing* from the mass of material Kaprow generated while he prepared the 1959 performance of *18 Happenings*.⁵⁷ Despite the challenge of re-integrating sound, movement, image and object from such imprecise and often contradictory sources as diagrams of props, stick-figure pictographs of movements, poems, photographic documentations, and graphs, the team stressed their fidelity to the materials preserved in Kaprow's archive. This move from the static and fixed confines of the page to the dynamic practice of performance, moreover, required a great deal of imaginative reconstruction. Noémie Solomon's presentation, for instance, illustrated the difficulty of translating the archive into embodied movement. As the *Re-doing's* movement choreographer, Solomon de-ciphered Kaprow's stick-figure diagrams of various gestures and poses, but as Kaprow lacked an effective notational system to depict his choreographic intentions, the movement "score" combined diagrams, written descriptions and something of a time meter. When she attempted to explain the difficulty of replicating the movements suggested by these illustrations, Solomon was twice at a loss for words. Arising from her chair to communicate with her body, she offered two

asked outright if they were still permitted to undertake the *Re-doing*, to which Kaprow replied that they might, "if you want to" (qtd. by Rosenthal *Re-doing*).

⁵⁷ Kaprow's archive of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, amassed between the summer and the fall of 1959 (Lepecki *18 Happenings*), is housed at the Getty Institute.

contradictory, yet equally justifiable, interpretations of one of Kaprow's drawn postures. Solomon's example poignantly revealed the challenges inherent in revisiting the archives of the historical avant-garde, where the desire for fidelity collides with the inconsistencies preserved within the archive, revealing gaps that draw attention to what the archive cannot contain.

Instead of acknowledging the archive's inherent voids, Lepecki's attempted fidelity seemed to efface the traces of these gaps. Most illustrative of this tendency was the exacting reconstruction of the *18 Happenings*' "loft." Kaprow's original performance space had been designed in response to the specifics of its location, the loft of the Reuben Gallery. Like a contemporary installation, the gallery's physical configuration in part determined the performance space and to some extent how Kaprow designed his performance. Instead of following the example of Kaprow's own reinventions or developing a spatial configuration that might hint at the "anexact" status of the work, Lepecki replicated Kaprow's original physical configuration, privileging the cultural capital of history. In the PSi panel, Lepecki admitted gaining access to the former location of the Reuben Gallery to measure the exact height of the ceilings and the loft's overall dimensions. Within this re-calculated space, the size of the three performance areas was determined by examining original documentary photographs and using the wooden chairs depicted within them as measuring devices to determine the size of the three "rooms" (Lepecki, *Re-doing*). When re-constructed, the set reprised Kaprow's use of translucent plastic stretched over rough wooden beams to define both the interior walls and the long hallway that ran parallel to the rooms. The important physical features such as the two-sided canvas shared between the wall of rooms one and two and the

strategically located mirrors were also dutifully replicated.⁵⁸ Within the space, each room featured the sort of wooden folding chairs evident in the photographic documentation of Kaprow's original presentation. Lepecki's exactitude emphasized the scholarly rigour of the *Re-doing* and divulging his recuperative efforts within the context of a panel discussion at a scholarly meeting not only fulfilled a professional responsibility, it also seemed to assert the Performance Studies "brand." As a witness to this scholarly performance I got the sense that Performance Studies, both as an international organization and as a prestigious academic department, could be counted on for *fidelity*, both in terms of trustworthiness and accuracy.

The Loft in the Vitrine

Lepecki's PSi panel piqued my interest in the *Re-doing* and I wondered how the exactness of such physical recuperations would square with the "anexactness" suggested by the fragmentary state of Kaprow's archive. Likewise, I wondered if such "insider" knowledge might unduly affect my perception of the performance. Regardless, I looked forward to seeing the *Re-doing* at its re-appearance in New York City one year after its presentation in Munich. Re-mounted at Deitch Studios, one of the string of contemporary art venues run by influential dealer Jeffrey Deitch,⁵⁹ the location emphasized the power of branding within the cultural consecration process. Across the river from New York City in Long Island City, the location played upon the tension between the cultural nexus

⁵⁸ Interestingly, Lepecki's *Re-doing* did not attempt to replicate the two "assemblages," one in Room One and the other that hid the control booth in Room Three. Such a move could be seen as an attempt to efface the influence of Kaprow's painting practice from this proto-performance art undertaking.

⁵⁹ Deitch was the impresario behind the 2006 reality-television project *Artstar*, where hopeful artists battled for the grand prize of a solo exhibition at one of Deitch's galleries.

of Manhattan and the creative diaspora that occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Carr 316-8). Housed in a dilapidated warehouse that nostalgically recalled the ramshackle venues that dotted Greenwich Village during the Happenings era, the street-front offered no obvious entry, but the doorway at the back of the building was inscribed with the distinctive Deitch logo.⁶⁰ Once inside, the viewer was confronted by a spacious and austere venue—an antiseptic contrast to the dinginess of the surrounding urban decay that intimated the refinement of a canonical repository. Lodged within the consecrating space of the Deitch venue, the loft lost its provocative edge and seemed re-positioned as an object of awe and veneration, not unlike the many replications of the *Fountain* preserved in copies of Duchamp's *La boîte-en-valise*. Framed within the pristine vitrine-like white-cube of the gallery, the loft seemed strangely at home within the contemporary art market; part relic and part fetish object, it projected a definite authority and foreboding physical presence—the loft seemed a colossal but transportable commodity.

The care and consideration evident in the construction and the presentation of the loft emphasized the scholarly effort and institutional backing underwriting the project. Additionally, this care intimated that the *Re-doing* project aspired to cultural consecration via ancestral fidelity. In the year that had passed since its first presentation, Lepecki had an opportunity to reconsider the set's exactitude and refurbish the performance space to respond to a new presentation context. Instead of being re-designed, the replicated loft once again served as the set for the performances presented by Performa and

⁶⁰ The Deitch Projects' logo stylistically appropriates the design of the Brillo box motif consecrated by Andy Warhol, a re-fabrication of an everyday commercial commodity (initially) as an art commodity, secondly as a canonical object and cultural sign. The logo draws upon the cultural capital of a formerly avant-garde image that has found its place within the canon of art history and as a valuable asset within the art market.

Performance Studies international, and emphasized the canonical value of the archive of avant-garde gestures. Yet, in his program notes, Lepecki claimed that the project was “not attached to notions of bringing to life ‘the past as it really was’” (Lepecki *18 Happenings*, n.p.). Aspiring to present a delicate balance of history and innovation, Lepecki noted: “in our attempt to be absolutely faithful to the power contained in Kaprow’s notes...we inevitably started testing the limits of the work itself” (Lepecki *18 Happenings*, n.p.). Despite Lepecki’s claims, such “testing” was not evident in the performance—it lacked any kind of register that revealed the extent that the work had been imaginatively reconstructed and, like the loft, the performance seemed to strive for reconstructive accuracy. The integrated sounds, images, movements and activities never pointed towards the problematic process of recuperation and, for all intents and purposes, the project presented itself as an “absolutely faithful” replication of Kaprow’s original *18 Happenings*.

On the evening that I witnessed the *Re-doing*, Lepecki’s desire to test the archives’ limits did not seem to register with the audience, nor did the project inspire any detectable embrace of civic activism; however, it did engender some cultural discourse. The project’s faithfully reproduced intermissions, where Michael Kirby once imagined audience members might discuss the differing *Happenings* that the performance’s restrictive perspectives had permitted them to experience, now were an opportunity to dissect the project’s shortcomings and historical revisionism. One man sitting behind me concluded that “It would be better that they had left it dead, than to kill it here and now.” In my own conversation with a young woman and man sitting in adjacent chairs, the woman somewhat wistfully concluded, “It’s like I thought it would be, kind of

interesting, kind of boring. But it's now what Happenings are for me.”⁶¹ Relying heavily upon the sanctity of the archive, the *Re-doing* ultimately re-iterated history over innovation.

Absolute Contemporaneity

By accessing a historical example an artist performs as if the archive continues to have contemporary relevance, and the act of recuperation stakes a claim both *for* and *upon* this relevance. A project like Fluid Authority that depends upon recuperation operates with such an assumption and treats past works as if they possess on-going viability and utility. The process simultaneously acknowledges one's indebtedness to a past work even as one begins to renovate that artwork's recognizable features. While such tensions are evident in the *Re-doing* project, both as a scholarly vehicle and as a live performance, there is also a hint of a problematic historicist revisioning motivating the undertaking. Such an idea is implicit in the concluding statement of Lepecki's production notes:

Each of these notes, each one of those pages are open invitations for rethinking how the acts proposed under a title as powerful as *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* produce new possibilities for rethinking performance's relationship to its own temporality—and for rediscovering the absolute contemporaneity of Kaprow's work.

(Lepecki *18 Happenings*)

⁶¹ I believe this discussion took place between myself, Lucas Ihlein and his companion, Lizzie. In Ihlein's blog (posted November 13, 2007), he briefly re-counts a discussion with “a performance artist from Calgary” that was likely myself.

Lepecki's idea of "absolute contemporaneity" insinuates the timelessness of the classic while flourishing the cutting-edge here-and-nowness of precedent-setting practice; it invokes both canonical prestige and avant-garde innovation. As Lepecki simultaneously paid tribute to the performance's past and pointed towards its possible future, *18 Happenings*' alleged "absolute contemporaneity" suggests why institutions saw value in the work's resuscitation.

Yearning to utilize creative practice to re-ignite civic engagement, Goldberg saw in the *Re-doing* a justification for revisiting a type of work "ripe for excavation" even as she hoped to discover "new directions in performance for the twenty-first century." While she had a vested interest in promoting the enduring validity of past performance practices within contemporary contexts, a notion like "absolute contemporaneity" effaced how ill-suited *18 Happenings* was for the task of re-igniting civic engagement and cultural activism. Despite the work's canonical status, Kaprow moved quite a distance from the sort of performance practices introduced in *18 Happenings* and began to develop participatory art practices that might have better-suited Goldberg's socio-political objectives.

The field of Performance Studies and its pair of institutional embodiments (the NYU academic department and the scholarly congress) also might have been attracted to a work of absolute contemporaneity—indeed, Lepecki's phrase echoes the notion of the "liminal-norm" identified by Jon McKenzie. Within his critique of the postdisciplinary field of Performance Studies, McKenzie noted how Schechner defined the field in terms of "intergeneric, interdisciplinary, intercultural" aspects that are "inherently 'in between'" (qtd. in McKenzie 50) stable disciplines and analytical models. This claim led

McKenzie to theorize “liminality” as *the* de facto identifying feature of Performance Studies. For McKenzie, the liminal-norm compromised Performance Studies’ notion of de-hierarchized field of study by privileging those activities that take place along the margins, the borders, or edges of cultural practice. With the margin re-inscribed as central to the field of study, what was once anomalous serves as a standard of comparison for subsequent cultural practices. In light of Schechner’s citation of the avant-garde as a precursor to Performance Studies, the notion of absolute contemporaneity suggests the normalization of avant-garde innovations. Instead of a work of art being historically bound and destined to be superseded by subsequent cultural works, the work of purported absolute contemporaneity escapes history and time, is able to forever be upon the forefront of culture, ever-relevant, and perpetually showing the way forward.

That a work such as Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* could be capable of inspiring the idea of absolute contemporaneity is remarkable, but such is what happens when the avant-garde is recuperated under institutional authority. Kaprow, the best-known unknown artist, a peripheral figure on the edge of the master narratives of art history and the avant-garde, was accessed to serve as one of the liminal subjects at the disposal of the institutions of cultural production and knowledge. Excavated from its archival remnants, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was reconstituted as an enduring and useful commodity within the field of cultural production. Invoked by a series of canonical institutions, the work shared its prestige with scholars such as Lepecki, academic disciplines like Performance Studies and museological projects in the vein of Goldberg’s Performa festival; in return *18 Happenings* garnered additional esteem through the attention these individuals and institutions lavished upon it. Where the neo-avant-gardes

retrieved the historical avant-garde to *critique* the institution of art, the *Re-doing* retrieved Kaprow's performative gesture to *endorse* institutions positioned as the perpetual avant-garde within the cultural field.

As much as I have learned from the avant-garde, I am not certain of its contemporary relevance—it is hard to imagine where the forefront might be as the field of art advances on a global scale. While establishing innovations and setting precedents is usually thought to be an important aspect of creative engagement, there is a value in rummaging among the remnants and imaging what recuperative-garde practice might be. Recuperation is, after all, not just a facet of creativity, but one of historical acknowledgement. The recent interest in Kaprow might be analogous to the delayed canonical recuperation of Duchamp in the 1960s and perhaps Kaprow's avant-garde project is only now being comprehended and enacted by a tardy neo-avant-garde. Poised for resurgence, his work may in the future be traced through the evidence of a Kaprow "genre." Despite having to leave the art world to do what he wanted to do (Rosenthal 57), Kaprow may yet be re-inscribed into its historical accounts, and instead of being "a household name only to fellow artists and art historians" (Meyer-Hermann73) perhaps his name will roll off the tongue in a litany of canonical figures, like Picasso, Pollock, Duchamp and Warhol before him. Taken up by so many, Kaprow's work has been shown to serve several purposes—a sign of both its vitality and its potential as an exploitable resource. I, too, turned to Kaprow for examples of participatory creative practice and attempted to see how his past precedents might be renovated for re-deployment in the contemporary cultural field. Unlike the institutions discussed above, my recuperative

project sees in Kaprow's work the potential to open up authorship so that it may be practiced beyond such realms of authority.

Chapter Four: Repeat When Necessary:
 David Khang's "Citational"
 and Recuperative Performance Practice

The past chapter's account of André Lepecki's *Re-doing* illustrated that previous creative precedents may be resurrected and re-presented, an example that is advantageous to the practice of Fluid Authority. Unlike the need for a creative gesture to be "punctual and final" as Peter Burger surmised with avant-garde works, artworks may have effects and applications long after their initial instantiation. Although I argued that Lepecki's re-performance project was ill-suited for the functions that it was invoked to serve, it does not mean that the process of resurrecting past works is intrinsically flawed, only that such projects must be understood within the context of their revivification. To better understand the circumstances under which a past work may be "recuperated" and begin to work towards how such a format may invite participatory audiences to experience creative engagement, the present chapter focuses upon David Khang's "citational performance," *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)*. Referencing works by Kubota, La Monte Young and David H. Hwang, Khang's project revisited previously extant creative works and utilized these as the "medium" for a critically informed recuperative art project that performatively examined the instability of gender identities.

It is worth asking how a creative work may serve as *medium* and the *Oxford Dictionary of English* provides a few salient clues. Of the six possible definitions, three are especially pertinent: "an agency or means of doing something"; "the intervening substance through which sensory impressions are conveyed or physical forces

transmitted”; and “the material or form used by an artist, composer, or writer” (1092). When conceptualizing a completed artwork as a “medium,” one does not settle upon a single definition but instead activates the three notions—a medium is simultaneously a performative deployment of material and the means through which creative communication occurs. When employed as a medium, the work of art ceases to be a subject for replication and becomes an accessible resource—the work’s established precedence and the example of its authorial engagement serve as a material and a practice that invites re-use, even though the recuperated work emerges under circumstances that are drastically different than its initial context. Considering a work of art as a medium for use in the production of subsequent works of art pries open the notion of authorship and suggests that it is not a stable identity but one that is occupied through practice. Authorship might be dead, but its example has permeable boundaries and it is a practice available for re-use and on-going exploration.

This fluidity suggests that when a work becomes a medium it may be re-iterated, as Lepecki noted with *18 Happenings*, in an “anexact” manner that is “beside or beyond the problem of exactitude” (Lepecki, “Re-doing” 47). It is worth remembering, however, that despite such a claim, Lepecki demonstrated great fidelity to Kaprow’s archival example. He replicated the “loft” performance space as closely as possible and even re-used Kaprow’s original tape-recorded score within the *Re-doing*. Such decisions are best understood in the context of “archivism” (12), the term art critic and historian Robert C. Morgan coined to describe the recent collection and preservation of all matters of ephemera generated by the “now legitimated institutional category of performance

art”(12).⁶² As it was informed by such standards, Morgan described Lepecki’s project as a “re-creation” (14) and contrasted it with Kaprow’s own 1988 reinvention of *18 Happenings*, pointing out that Kaprow extensively altered the work and produced a “re-performance...radically different in its appearance from the original version” (14). As both the Lepecki “re-creation” and Kaprow’s own “re-performance” suggest that *18 Happenings* remains an accessible and retrievable resource, it is important to consider the full range of such “recuperative” performances. While a term such as *re-performance* might seem a more useful way to describe what occurs when past works of art are revisited and re-mounted, it in fact implies replication and suggests that the process faithfully recaptures or re-produces the structures and intents of the initiating project. As such, re-performance would seem analogous to theatrical productions that use pre-existing and presumably stable scripts as the basis of a new version of the past work. With performance art works, the initial work was not often based upon any document as stable as a script and the most verifiable information concerning the initial performance are often those items, images and documents produced by the performance itself. Moreover, the extent that such items account for the entirety of a work (that unfolds temporally and spatially) is doubtful.

To draw attention to the problems inherent in re-performance I have deliberately chosen to describe the process as one of “recuperation” because the awkwardness of the term underscores the contingent status of the recovered work. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* suggests that a “recuperative” action is one that has “the effect of restoring health or strength” and that to “recuperate” in part is to “recover or regain (something lost or

⁶² Special thanks to Brian Rusted for bringing Robert C. Morgan’s article to my attention.

taken)” (1473). Both definitions remind us that the initial action of performance disperses the work over time and itself concludes the life of that work. Post-performance, the work is a scatter of partial memories and impressions that when re-combined do not constitute the performance itself, but only its fragmentary remnant. The process of returning to such works and re-animating them is not like flicking on an automaton’s switch and watching the mechanism snap to life, but one of sifting through the remnants to identify what the past work might have been and to determine those scraps of possibility that might be re-engaged and bear resuscitation. Such a process, then, does not aspire to replicate the past as it was, but points out the impossibility of such an endeavour even as it tries to return parts of that imperfectly preserved past to some vitality and relevance. Emphasizing that something lost or past has been recovered or regained, recuperative performance asserts the importance of established creative gestures and attempts to see within them on-going potential. Instead of a replication of a past gesture, this recovery implies variability in the form of the recuperated material and how it may be re-presented. As such recuperative performance does not consist of a single rationale, but seems to have no less than three over-lapping desires.

The first type of recuperation would be analogous to the archivism identified by Morgan and evident in a work such as Lepecki’s *Re-doing*. Here, the chief function is preservation, whereby the project is designed as a sort of embodied and re-animated inventory of what the archive contains. The “re-performance” or “re-creation” is concerned with fidelity to the extant historical record and pursued to test the on-going validity of previously established works. A second form parallels the practice established by Kaprow within the reinventions of his own past works; the previously established

work of art is recuperated to serve as the basis “or medium” of a new creative work. In contrast to the fidelity of the first form, this second form may take extensive liberties with the past example as it re-models and renovates its form. Recuperative practice’s third form follows the lead of critical performance art practice and revisits performative interventions and provocations that were previously launched to confront and challenge dominant social practices. The recuperation in this final instance accesses the initial performance to access and re-activate that work’s previously established critical lens; this lens then may be applied to radically different temporal circumstances to draw attention to on-going cultural inequities. These three forms of recuperation, however, are not mutually exclusive and impenetrable—at times the recuperation may feature multiple motivations. At the risk of belabouring the example of the *Re-doing*, it is worth noting that while Lepecki seemed to execute a preservationist or archivist recuperation, it was presented as part of RoseLee Goldberg’s curatorial programme designed to recuperate performance art’s criticality.

A further example might help to clarify the layering of recuperative motivations and practices—Marina Abramović’s intriguing undertaking *Seven Easy Pieces*. Presented at New York City’s Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2005, the project re-visited six seminal performance art pieces from the 1960s and 70s by Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, VALIE EXPORT, Bruce Nauman, and Gina Pane, and by Abramović herself. The seventh “*Piece*” was the premiere of a new Abramović work, *Entering the Other Side*. Re-animating a series of established precedents, Abramović considered her project a means “to establish some kind of framework about how it [“re-performance”] can be done in a way that’s true to the original” and “to establish what the possible rules are for”

the practice of re-performance (19). Within these combined goals we can detect both a preservationist perspective and an edge of criticality. As an internationally respected practitioner, Abramović claimed that, “it is my duty to retell the story of performance art in a way that respects the past and also leaves space for interpretation” (10); however, the work developed in response to “several young performance artists who repeat different performances from the seventies without giving credit to the original source” (Abramović 10). To set a more sensitive example, *Seven Easy Pieces* was undertaken in part to establish a “model for reenacting other artists’ performance pieces in the future” (10). This model included securing the initiating artist’s permission to re-perform the piece, paying a copyright fee,⁶³ and exhibiting archival materials, such as “photographs, video, relics” (11), produced by the work’s initial instantiation. Devised to respectfully re-present past works, Abramović’s model took seriously the responsibilities intrinsic to the recuperative process.⁶⁴

While the re-performance standards that Abramović developed acknowledged the importance of the original “photographs, video, relics,” the unreliable quality of these documentary records were one of the problems that Abramović hoped to address through

⁶³ The exhibition’s catalogue reprints the “Letter of Agreement” (230) sent on behalf of Abramović by Nancy Spector to those artists selected for *Seven Easy Pieces*. Instead of offering a “copyright fee,” the project offered an “honorarium” to the selected artists. For a discussion of whether a performance is a copyrightable property see Philip Auslander’s *Liveness: Performance in a Mediated Culture* (131-153).

⁶⁴ Following her own directives caused Abramović to compromise the project that she had originally envisioned. For instance, requesting permission did not guarantee a work’s availability—Chris Burden denied Abramović permission to re-do his 1974 performance *Trans-fixed* (Umathum 47). As well, the Guggenheim also denied Abramović permission to re-do her own piece *Rhythm 0* (1974), because the work’s inclusion of a loaded revolver as one of its elements represented a security risk (Umathum 53).

re-performance. In an interview conducted by Nancy Spector after *Seven Easy Pieces*' completion, Abramović discussed her rationale:

It is a very big problem that when certain performance works were made, the artists never left a set of instructions or clues, because they didn't think it was necessary at the time....Sometimes we can go backwards and find out information, even if the artist is dead, and see if we can come up with a set of instructions. It's better to have instructions than not, because people will re-perform the work anyway. (21)

Since the archive lacked the requisite documentary evidence to sustain the re-performance ideal that she envisioned, Abramović took it upon herself to re-perform past performance works. Her embodied example was extensively documented⁶⁵ to replenish the archive that subsequent artists might access (Abramović 11) and to simultaneously set standards of how that resource might be used. *Seven Easy Pieces* thus illustrates how critical and archival perspectives may inform a recuperative art project. Although the desire to preserve performance art's archival remnants and to provide a critical example of how those materials might be accessed were foregrounded in the project, there was a sense that Abramović “took considerable liberties in terms of how she re-staged the various events—changing this, adding that” (Morgan 11).⁶⁶ Although such amendments and adaptations were secondary to *Seven Easy Pieces*' main thrust, they do point towards

⁶⁵ Abramović hired documentary filmmaker Babette Mangolte “to record every minute of the total forty-nine hours...[and] to avoid ‘repeating the mistakes of the ‘70s’”(Burton n.p.).

⁶⁶ Morgan saw *Seven Easy Pieces* as being “In contrast to the archival approach to performance,” and noted that “There were, of course, contradictions in these performances in terms of her stated intentions, but these did not seem to interfere with the power of the various works” (Morgan 11).

how past works may serve as the material for new works. While Abramović never seemed to claim that she was fashioning new works through her re-performances, her project hints at the complexity of recuperative art practice, where preservation, criticality and creative reinvention may overlap.

David Khang's Citational Recuperation of the Avant-garde

Unlike the case of *Seven Easy Pieces* where past works were chiefly recuperated for preservationist and critical motivations, past works may also be recuperated to serve as the medium for new creative ventures such as David Khang's *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)*. While the project also had its critical function, Khang's example illustrates how past works can be accessed and creatively reconfigured. Khang's performance, *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)*, took place November 10, 2007 at the Tisch School for the Arts, New York University and was co-sponsored by The Franklin Furnace Archive, Performance Studies international and New York University. Like Lepecki's *Re-doing*, Khang's project was presented as part of P.S.i #13: Performance, Happening, Event, but unlike the resurrection of Kaprow's seminal work, Khang's recuperative gesture was not associated with the concurrent Performa 07 Festival. Whereas the *Re-doing* and each of the re-performances that comprised *Seven Easy Pieces* focused upon individual performance art works, David Khang's "citational"⁶⁷ performance drew upon an array of historical examples that he reconfigured as the medium for his contemporary creative investigation. Incorporating a trio of works all

⁶⁷ Khang's webpage uses this term to describe *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)* and also made the claim that each work had been performed in New York City. See <http://www.davidkhang.com/2007/Proj3/yr1.htm> and claims that the performances

originally “performed” in New York City, Khang’s performance acknowledged Kubota’s *Vagina Painting* (1965), La Monte Young’s *Composition 1960 #5*, and David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* (1988). Rather than these “citations” succinctly replicating any of the work, Khang’s project accessed the key elements of these differing creative resources and revived them within a ritualistic endurance performance that drastically reconfigured and blurred the recognizable features of the “cited” works. Pointing towards Kaprow’s interest in reinvention, Khang’s project freely adapted the materials at his disposal, suggesting how artists might re-apply past examples. Additionally, *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)* followed the critical lead of the material that Khang had invoked and formed an investigative lens that performatively examined issues of gender identification and racial privileging at the foundation of leading edge cultural practice.

As I was a first-hand witness of the performance and because *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)* has yet to attract scholarly or critical attention, I will describe the work in some detail. The venue for many of PSi #13’s performances was a rehearsal space within NYU’s Department of Performance Studies that throughout the conference was known as “The Happenings Lounge.” Within the Lounge, Khang’s performance space took up the majority of the rectangular room, leaving only enough space for a single row of chairs along the two long sides of the room. One of the short sides of the room had a double row of staggered chairs,⁶⁸ while the fourth side of the room was left clear and served as a “screen” for video and image projection. One half of the performance space was dedicated to a large paper scroll (approximately 20 x 20 feet) that was rolled out upon the floor and terminated by the open wall; the other half of the performance space

⁶⁸ There may have only been a single row of chairs along this side of the room.

was enclosed by sheer mosquito-netting that draped from the ceiling to the floor. Across the room from the enclosure and in front of the one bare wall were laid out a number of items: ink and inkwell, lubricant, harnesses, and a large calligraphic brush. The performance began when Khang entered the lounge, wearing a bulky white robe tied at the waist. Khang's head was shaved clean and all visible parts of his body were completely covered in a chalky white powder. As he moved slowly and deliberately through the space, a video projection began upon the open wall. Beginning with the full citation of Young's score—"Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area"—the video then illustrated the metamorphosis of a butterfly. As it advanced from a cluster of eggs to the caterpillar larvae phase and finally climaxed with the dramatic emergence from its pupa sac as a butterfly, the video soundtrack shrilly played an aria from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*.

While the video played, Khang moved a large container from before the screen to within the enclosure and then he stoically knelt and faced the projection area. When the video was complete, he opened the container to release a trio of butterflies.⁶⁹ He then briefly interacted with these creatures, and allowed them to perch upon his hands and the collar of his robe. Subsequently Khang emerged from the enclosure and left the butterflies to lethargically flutter around the enclosed space. Outside of the sheer netting Khang re-settled himself before the performance's objects and with his back turned to the "screen" where the iconic still-photographic image of Shigeko Kubota performing *Vagina Painting* was projected. As this image loomed over Khang, he prepared the ink by mixing it with the large calligraphic brush. Next Khang affixed a wide leather harness

⁶⁹ The overlapping of these actions is somewhat confused in my memory. Khang may have freed the butterflies while the video played, instead of waiting for its conclusion.

underneath his robe and around his waist. After applying lubricant to a small object, he reached beneath his robe and seemed to attach the object to the harness and grunted as he presumably inserted it into his anus. Khang then arose from his kneeling position and assumed a squatting posture. He hiked up the voluminous material of his flowing robe and seemed to insert the calligraphic brush into the harness and anal plug. As the black ink dripped and stained the paper beneath his feet, Khang paused a moment and seemed to summon his concentration. Using a bent-kneed, squatted posture, Khang began his (vag)anal painting, each step requiring him to labouriously swing one leg as the other provided a pivot point. This gait allowed the bristles of the brush to maintain near-constant contact with the paper scroll, and made a broad and wavering mark upon the paper's surface. Each step seemed a test of endurance and Khang often gasped and grunted with the effort but, over several additional minutes, Khang methodically completed a figure-eight circuit that inscribed the shape of an infinity symbol.

Though obviously struggling, Khang embarked upon a second circuit—each step was resolutely retraced and the broad stroke of the calligraphic brush refined the initial wavering symbol into a more concise shape. Even more painful to witness than the first circuit, Khang's progress throughout the re-inscription slowed considerably and every movement forward seemed to require the artist to re-gather his energy to complete his task. When the doubled infinity symbol was completed, Khang struggled to release the brush from his anus and loosen the harness—eventually they unceremoniously dropped to the floor at his feet. Obviously exhausted and in some discomfort, Khang gingerly crossed the performance space once more and exited the Happenings Lounge. A long moment of contemplative silence ensued where we in the audience seemed uncertain how

to respond. Was the performance over? Was it appropriate to applaud? Or was it best to sit in silent contemplation and reflect upon what we had experienced? The spell was finally broken when an enthusiastic young man suddenly arose from his chair and heartily clapped. The rest of the audience eventually but hesitantly joined him.

Works Cited

Rather than a literal replication of Young and Kubota's creative examples, Khang's citation of *Composition 1960 #5* and *Vagina Painting* were utilized as a medium for his own creative engagement. Even though the initial gestures were evident as they served as the basis for the performance's two separate and distinct junctures, the release of the butterflies and the (vag)anal painting, these enactments extended and embellished the cited gestures and began to pressure their integrity. With the first citation, Young's evocative written directives were invoked; echoing John Cage's famous 4'33," the aleatory structure of Young's *Composition* bracketed a specific context and drew attention to the unexpected and often unnoticed occurrences that transpire within the limits set by the composition. Khang, however, adapted Young's directives. Instead of initiating the composition by setting the butterflies free in the performance space and allowing the creatures' unpredictable actions to be the sole focus of our attention, Khang's intervened into the composition by "freeing" the butterflies into a subsidiary enclosure and then remaining with them. Confined to a specific space, the butterflies and the activities that might have occurred were severely limited by the defining structures of the meshed curtains. As he gently interacted with the butterflies, Khang shared the focus of the audience's attention. Indeed, as they gravitated towards him and rested upon his

outstretched hand and atop his robe, Khang seemed bracketed by the butterflies and his every movement was intensified by the proximity of the butterflies' fragile beauty.⁷⁰ Re-conceived as a medium, Young's *Composition 1960 #5* no longer simply suggested the free-play of aleatory possibilities but an alternative framework for structuring action.

What was initially designed to be a simple and poetic action that stood on its own was answered by the second citation. Despite the lethargy of the butterflies, the allusion to Young's composition unpredictably continued while Khang introduced Shigeko Kubota's provocative performance art gesture. Originally presented at the Perpetual Fluxus Festival (New York City, July 4, 1965), *Vagina Painting* was cited through one of the iconic photographic images taken by Fluxus kingpin George Maciunas. In this black-and-white image we observe a frozen moment of Kubota, dressed in a dark top and shorts, squatting. With a brush attached to her underpants, Kubota is caught in the act of inscribing a mark upon the stage where she performed. The image, however, conceals as much as it reveals: her squatting posture casts a dark shadow that obscures the marks that she was then making, while the angle of the photograph blurs the details of her previous marks upon the stage. As well, Maciunas' photograph fails to account for the contextual factors that informed Kubota's gesture and leaves unanswered the physicality and temporality of Kubota's actions. When *Vagina Painting* is discussed in art critical and historical accounts, it is often introduced as a "response" to the lingering dominance of

⁷⁰ The *Composition's* aleatory quality was underscored by the unpredictability of one of the butterflies. Clinging to Khang's robe, one escaped the mesh enclosure and subverted its assigned performance responsibilities. At the conclusion of the performance the rogue butterfly was re-captured by the "enthusiastic young man" that had initiated our hesitant applause.

action painting.⁷¹ In place of the masculinist ejaculatory gestures explored by Jackson Pollock and the Abstract Expressionists, Kubota's performance literalized the "action" of painting and returned it to the question of practice and process. Instead of yielding a concise image that might demonstrate the self-sufficiency, self-absorption and conviction articulated by Michael Fried, Kubota's action suggests that the painted image is a result of embodied engagement with materials over a specific duration—indeed, it seems that Kubota's performance points towards the irreducibility of the dynamic act of painting to a static physical image.

If painting cannot be reduced to an image that consists of smears of oil, wax or acrylic upon a surface, can the performance of painting be reduced or contained by a photographic documentation? What can we discern of the tempo of Kubota's movements from the Macunias photograph? What does the photograph tell us about the duration of Kubota's task? Does the documentation suggest that Kubota attempted to inscribe a specific image or was she satirizing the painterly mark-making of action painting? Cited as Khang prepared his anal apparatus, the photograph provides a perplexingly mute point of departure. As Khang's actions re-mediated the static image, he provided no definitive answers but seemed to point towards a series of re-posed questions. Moving labouriously and deliberately for an extended period, straining to inscribe the shape of an infinity symbol, Khang's actions pressured our assumptions about the duration of Kubota's efforts. Did the *Vagina Painting* last as long as Khang's (*vag*)anal rehearsal? Was the initial gesture as painful to observe as Khang's re-enactment? Did Kubota struggle to complete her task as Khang had done? How legible was Kubota's imagery compared to

⁷¹ See Jayne Wark's *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (46-8) and Amelia Jones' *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (97-8).

the identifiable sign inscribed by Khang? As he retrieved Kubota's action, Khang did not merely replicate the gesture, but opened it up to interrogation.

While Khang's resuscitation of Kubota's actions yielded no conclusive answers, the doubled infinity symbol provides a clue that might make the gesture more sensible. First inscribed with a wavering effort, Khang then solidified the sign through painful re-inscription, a double re-enactment that recalls initial and subsequent remembrances. Memory, however, is not a perfect replication of the past, but an uncertain echoing—every retention is an approximation that revises and obfuscates the original experience. This doubling and imperfect retrieval are also evident in the other citation informing Khang's work, *M. Butterfly*. While acknowledged in the title of Khang's project, David H. Hwang's play is less directly sourced than either Young or Kubota's works and obliquely informs Khang's recuperative performance. Itself a recuperative gesture, Hwang's play absorbed and re-configured Puccini's opera, *Madama Butterfly*, doubling the operatic tragedy with a historically based tale blending gender misidentification and cold-war espionage.⁷² The opera's duplicitous marriage, engineered by United States Navy Lieutenant Pinkerton to Cio-Cio San (*Madama Butterfly*), is mirrored by the relationship that develops between the Chinese spy Song Liling, a male performing female roles in the Beijing opera, and French diplomat Rene Gallimard. Unaware that Song is male, Gallimard falls in love with the singer, whom he calls "Butterfly." Against the backdrop of France's loosening grip upon the Vietnamese peninsula, Song provides Gallimard with misleading information regarding Maoist China's interest in Vietnam,

⁷² The play adapts the relationship between Bernard Boursicot, a French diplomat stationed in Peking, and Shi Pei Pu, a male opera singer who performed female roles in the Chinese opera and was a covert operative for Communist China. Throughout a long-term affair, Boursicot was apparently unaware of Pu's sex (Li 119-120).

while extracting French intelligence from the diplomat. Re-constructed through a series of recollections that Gallimard re-imagines some twenty years after the incidents that lead to his incarceration for treason, *M. Butterfly* itself provides an example of recuperation and reconfiguration analogous to Khang's practice.

Hwang's play, like Puccini's opera, climaxes with a suicide: through her self-inflicted fatal wounds Madama Butterfly attempted to assuage her shame at being abandoned by Pinkerton, while Gallimard's performance of *seppuku* follows his unsuccessful attempt to assume the identity of "Butterfly." A form of ritualistic self-disembowelment, *seppuku* was originally devised by the samurai as a means of dying with honour rather than being captured on the field of battle. Eventually it evolved into a form of capital punishment for samurai convicted of murder, corruption or treason ("Seppuku" n.p.). Once institutionalized, *seppuku* became highly ritualized: the convicted was bathed, dressed in a ceremonial white robe and fed his favourite meal prior to execution. Khang's choice of a white robe, then, cites the double self-inflicted deaths of Madame Butterfly and Gallimard; instead of suggesting imminent violence and self-annihilation, Khang accessed the ritual's apparatus and costume for re-generative ends. As he knelt to prepare the ink, a long phallus-like brush replaced the tantō, the short blade used in *seppuku*. Instead of opening his kimono and bearing his stomach to insert a blade and inflict a fatal wound, Khang drew the brush beneath his robes and, concealing his actions, seemed to insert its handle into his anus. Rather than liquidating his bowels and spilling his blood to assuage some crime and conclude a chapter of ignominy, Khang emphasized the bowels as a site of creative agency and expression. Controlling the brush with his anal muscles, Khang purposefully directed the ink into a legible inscription that

countered ideas of retributive annihilation or absolution with those of eternal continuity and regenerative potentiality.

Khang's robe not only concealed the definitive location of the brush handle, but more importantly it underscored the issues of gender indeterminacy and deception intrinsic to Hwang's play. Recalling how Song Liling's kimono and performance of an idealized femininity masked his sex, the oversized folds of crisp, white material likewise obscured Khang's. With only ashen head, hands, and feet emerging from the garment, Khang somewhat resembled a geisha but features that might have succinctly epitomized gender were withheld. Within this milieu of indefinite and inconclusive gender performances, Khang's undisclosed manipulation of the calligraphic brush was even more intriguing. While the brush might have been re-claimed as a phallus and creative agency re-asserted as a male domain, Khang's shrouded manipulation of it as a creative tool simultaneously acknowledged Kubota's assertion of creative agency while echoing Song's performance as a gender double agent. The notion of a male artist re-animating Kubota's performative precedent may seem problematic, but Khang's embodied citation of Song emphasizes the criticality of Kubota's initial gesture. Launched by a non-male, non-white artist in the midst of a triumphal masculinist Modernism, Kubota's *Vagina Painting* was directed at dominant cultural practices and identities; likewise Song Liling's subversive gender performance was a tactical maneuver launched against exploitive colonial powers. Rather than usurping Kubota's critique and re-iterating it from a privileged male position, Khang recuperated her critical lens and re-applied it to contemporary circumstances. Khang's emulation of Song's indeterminately gendered body renounced his masculinity and asserted his kinship with disempowered identities.

Rather than privileging one gesture over the other, the simultaneous citation of Kubota and Song kept both gestures in play and illustrated how the issues of gender, sexuality, cultural privilege and socio-political power relations continue to resonate through their re-visitation and re-animation.

Repeat When Necessary

While the twinned recuperation of the Kubota's gesture and Song's gender indeterminacy combined to form a critical lens, as I mentioned above recuperative gestures may be layered one on top of another. While Khang was obviously concerned with examining gender and cultural inequities, his example also demonstrates that recuperative practice accessing past works to serve as a fluid creative medium. The notion that past works of art may serve as a medium for subsequent artworks, however, may be done a bit of a disservice by Khang's designation of *M. Butterfly* as a "citational" undertaking. The dialogue established between the performance's differing references blurs the distinctness that might be associated with an act of citation. Accessed in part, juxtaposed and over-laid with each other, the past precedents that Khang utilized were not merely acknowledged—they were put to use. Intermingled and simultaneously invoked, the once-separate gestures of Hwang, Kubota and Young lost their concrete identities and became fluid authorial examples re-configured by Khang within a work that differed significantly from the aggregate contents and purposes of its acknowledged sources. Put to use by Khang, the integrity and validity of the "citations" were challenged and tested; what each work could be said to mean and how they might make meaning was drastically revised through re-use. Khang's recuperative performance then did not merely

re-iterate the cognitive associations that cling to past precedents; it renewed and extended them by demonstrating their applicability and relevance within contemporary contexts.

Singular re-use, though, might not qualify as re-designating a past performance art gesture as a medium. While the project that Khang presented in 2007 at Performance Studies international incorporated and elaborated upon works by La Monte Young and Shigeo Kubota, it was not the only time that he had invoked those artists' works as a medium for his own performances. Young's *Compositions 1960* had served as a medium for a performance "trilogy" that included the 2004 projects *Zen for Mouth / Draw a Straight Line* and *Speaking of Butterflies* (Hopkins, note 2), and the later *How to Feed a Piano* (2010). Likewise, Khang had twice previously recuperated Kubota's *Vagina Painting* as a medium for his own creative explorations. 2005's *(vag)Anal Painting (after Shigeo Kubota)* re-mediated the gesture into the ritualistic (vag)anal painting echoed by the *M. Butterfly* project. Like the 2007 re-mediation, Khang attempted to inscribe a sensible character with a brush manipulated by his anus. In the place of the infinity symbol produced within the PSi performance, the *(vag)Anal Painting* yielded a jagged, circular sign that was formed by completing several wavering circuits upon a smaller paper surface. Subsequently, Khang returned to Kubota's example for *Number Two* (2006) and combined the action of the anal-painting with an oral accompaniment by clutching a second calligraphic brush in his teeth. On an approximately four-foot square of paper, Khang squatted and spun around, an action that attempted to simultaneously inscribe a double circular form. The precedent established by Kubota, itself a response and re-mediation of the trope of action painting, transcends its historical boundaries and

its status as an event; Khang's serial invocation of her work demonstrates its continual accessibility and usability some forty-five years after its initial instantiation.

Khang's embodied citation and creative elaboration of the past has its ethical implications; what fidelities, if any, does an artist owe to the past or is the past a resource that is readily available for retrieval and re-use? In an interview with Glenn Alteen, Khang discussed the past as an aggregate of cultural memory, amnesia and nostalgia that he terms "remembering things as they never were" (21). The sum of our shared cultural memory, for Khang, consists of both humanity's achievements and of those injustices underwritten by intolerance of difference. Cultural amnesia, however, acts to reflexively efface our collective shortcomings, as it combines with nostalgia to re-draw a misleading account of what has happened. The past, then, is unreliable and unstable, subject to both misremembering and forgetting that "change the past and its trajectory into the future" (Khang 21). Conceived as mutable and revisable, Khang does not approach the past as a sacred trust, but as a resource that still might have some purchase within contemporary discourse:

In the art context, the way I remember and reference the Fluxus era of artistic production (Paik, Kubota, Young), is not an attempt to recover and pay homage to some gloriously experimental moment in art history, but rather re-imagining politics and poetics today, tempered by the gravity of more recent histories. (21)

Citing the *Vagina Painting* accesses the act's historical associations, while it establishes the work as a site where such adjacent issues as persistent phallogentrism and the "white" gaze's fetishization of the Asian body (21) may be performatively explored.

Perhaps recuperative performance's responsibilities to the past are analogous to Chapter 1's concern for the spectre of compulsory participation. Dealing with the past is not optional—an artist must choose to either acknowledge the past as a subject, or be subject to it. While re-visiting the past may be necessary, repeating the past is not. The past and its precedents may govern the possibilities for practice within the present, but recuperative art practice gives us the opportunity to test the past works' contemporary relevance and to question their on-going validity. By considering the past and its authority to be a fluid medium, an artist mitigates that authority and gains a repertoire of strategies for continuing creative engagement that acknowledges the past's accomplishments even as those established precedents are invoked to critique the past's shortcomings and inequities. Khang's recuperative engagement illustrates the ways that the past might be retrieved and how it may serve as both a critical lens and as a creative medium. *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)* demonstrates the past's accessibility and how an artist might use and adapt earlier creative works and re-deploy these as the basis of new works. The sort of creative retrieval, re-use and reinvention featured in recuperative art practice is also found in *Fluid Authority*. While the an artist like Khang employs the practice as a vehicle for creative criticality, the next chapter demonstrates that past works and working methods may be recuperated to serve as the medium for audience engagement and as the means by which creative authorship is experienced.

Chapter Five: On the Blurring of Artist and Audience:
Recuperating Art Practices
as Participatory Art Models

The recuperative art practices discussed in the previous chapters transpired within institutional settings located in major international art centres, and such elite-level attention suggests the contemporary interest in creative works that revisit and resurrect past works. As the preceding chapter outlined, recuperation may have several motivations and manifestations, including re-performance as a means of preservation, as a way to access a previously established critical lens and, lastly, recuperation may make a past work available to serve as the medium for a new creative endeavour. André Lepecki's *Re-doing* project, Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*, and David Khang's *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)* all demonstrated that the past is a retrievable resource, but these recuperations were all undertaken by artists and re-presented in a format that reiterated the traditional roles of artists producing and audiences consuming works of art. To explore the applicability of recuperative art practices as an avenue for audience engagement and to examine how it might challenge the distinction between artist and audience this chapter turns away from recognized global art centres and influential institutions and instead focuses upon a pair of creative undertakings that took place in the western Canadian city of Calgary. *The Patch Project*, an initiative devised by TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary, and *Imaginary Ordinary: A Community Mapping Project* will serve as case studies for exploring recuperative and participatory strategies that invite audience participation.

The range of contemporary participatory art practices that might have been included in this study is varied and many worthwhile alternatives were possible. Projects such as WochenKlausur's "concrete interventions" and Suzanne Lacy's Oakland projects have their merits but each has already generated significant scholarly attention; by contrast the pair of Calgary endeavours have yet to receive an equivalent level of recognition. Likewise *Learning How to Love You More* by Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July, Paul Butler's Collage Parties and Mammalian Diving Reflex each would illustrate some of the diverse methods used by artists to accommodate a participatory audience; however, instead of diluting the focus of the research by ranging far and wide for multiple examples of participatory engagement, within the very structures of *Imaginary Ordinary* and *The Patch Project*, a wide array of strategies and situations that illustrate how artists invite the participatory engagement of audiences and facilitate creative experiences are included. Both of these Calgary-based projects presented authorship as an experiential opportunity, the former by considering creative art practices as accessible techniques that could be shared with its audience, the latter by introducing its audience to a range of art-informed methods of "practicing" community. Neither project assumed art to be an elite-level skill where mastery was a prerequisite to participation; instead, both presented the creative process and perspective as accessible and, interestingly, largely social. While the works discussed demonstrate a sociability that might resemble the relational art examples discussed in Chapter One, they differ greatly from the work promoted by Nicolas Bourriaud; in place of open-endedness and indeterminate structures the Calgary-based projects featured the introduction of concise experiences and goal-oriented processes. Offering an alternative to the relational art practices that have

dominated the discourse concerning participatory art, *The Patch Project* and *Imaginary Ordinary* both offered creative templates that re-configured creativity as a participatory experience that blurred the borders between artists and audience members. While these practices may echo those that are evident in the other more widely-known examples, they might be thought of as examples that demonstrate the developing interest in creative participation.

The desire to move between such states is not entirely new. The second chapter in part examined Allan Kaprow's wish to challenge the distinction between art and life. In that section, I argued that part of this struggle involved Kaprow's efforts to develop structures that invited participation and blurred the distinction between artists and audiences, a thematic that has returned to prominence in the contemporary era. Creative situations that bring together artists and audiences essentially offer an alternative to the creative discourses that dominate contemporary cultural production; instead of offering images, objects and experiences of creativity executed by another, it is a participatory method of experiencing creativity. While Bourriaud and his curatorial colleagues have facilitated many worthwhile creative undertakings, their interests have yet to adequately accommodate or account for a participatory spectatorship that permits authorial experiences. To distinguish this chapter's subjects from the long shadow cast by relational art practices, participatory art practice's alternative perspectives are examined at length. Although such comments might shade this thesis with an "anti-relational" hue, the stance of being "anti" is not merely oppositional. In *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Foundation of Post-Modernism*, Thomas McEvilley examined the avant-garde's "anti-art" practices and surmised that avant-garde

artists both positioned themselves “against” dominant art practices, and offered alternatives that could be pursued “instead of” prevailing creative conventions (15). In many ways, the sort of participatory art practices featured in this chapter and that exemplify Fluid Authority are positioned in just such a manner: contrasting with current theorizations of participation, Fluid Authority offers an alternative practice of audience engagement and experience of creativity.

In such a relationship, the audience gains something tangible (an experience of creativity and insight into authorship), but what are the benefits to the field of art? As the audience gains insight into creativity, their creative literacy and ability to engage with more complex and varied types of creative production is enhanced. Under such circumstances, the field of art not only gains a more intelligent audience, but an audience that has the potential to be full participants capable of contributing to the field’s terrain of possibility. While such a claim may seem excessive, the example of the Duchamp “genre” might be analogous. The field of art did not immediately accept Duchamp’s creative examples nor did it quickly absorb the full benefit of his creative gestures; several years passed before Duchamp’s notion of creation by designation and the readymade were recognized as viable creative strategies. Enabling this change was a creatively literate audience that experienced Duchamp’s work not as executed objects and images but as retrievable templates that might bear re-visitation and re-use. While it might seem that I am assuming the value of this sort of participation, Chapter One illustrated participation is becoming an important aspect of contemporary art. With the increasing necessity for audiences to become participants, it is imperative to define the sort of participation that might provide the most benefit. While talk of “benefits” might

seem paternalistic, the participatory art practices discussed in the present chapter differ from the remedial strategies sometimes associated with the historical avant-garde. Avant-gardist provocations, as Grant Kester has noted, were often launched to have an “orthopedic” effect upon their audiences and provide the benefit of correcting the audience’s faulty “perceptual apparatus” (*Conversation*, 87-8). For Kester, such gestures imagined “the viewer as an inherently flawed subject” (87-8), but neither *The Patch Project* nor *Imaginary Ordinary* assumed their audiences were in need of such restitution. Instead both projects conceived of its audience as possessing capabilities and being up to the challenge of experiencing and utilizing creativity.

The Patch Project: to bring “art to the public and the public to art.”

TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary is an artist-run centre, a co-operative, not-for-profit organization whose mandate emphasizes presenting and promoting contemporary art practices. In Canada, artist-run centres (or A.R.C.s) were originally developed to provide an alternative to institutional exhibition venues, such as museums and public galleries, and to commercial galleries. This grassroots model spread across much of the country in the 1970s and 1980s as galleries were established in several major urban centres. What were once alternative spaces, however, are now vital institutions within Canada’s cultural industry. Receiving significant public funding, A.R.C.s provide a place for emerging artists to launch their careers and for established artists to undertake more experimental works. Within Canada’s relatively small art market, artist-run centres

tend to feature works that have limited commercial viability, such as media arts,⁷³ installation and performance. Unlike public galleries and museums that employ curators to set an exhibition agenda (such as Nicolas Bourriaud, RoseLee Goldberg, and Nancy Spector in previous chapters), artist-run centres usually employ a peer review jury to determine the gallery's programming (Wawzonek 7-8). These juries examine exhibition and event proposals and attempt to choose a slate of ventures that fulfills the specific centre's mandate and satisfies the need for diversity of programming. While curators are encouraged to submit proposals to artist-run centres, such projects are the minority.

TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary is one of three artist-run centres located in Calgary's downtown core.⁷⁴ Founded in 1983 as The Second Story Art Society, TRUCK (like Calgary's other two A.R.C.s) programmes a main gallery location featuring a "white cube" exhibition space and a "+15" public window space located within Calgary's elevated interior pedestrian corridor. The organization's mandate, "to foster innovative artistic practice" and "to encourage experimentation," aims to "engage artists and the public in a discussion about" contemporary art.⁷⁵ Such sentiments, however, are similar in tone and aspiration to the mandates and mission statements published by other artist-run centres. With *The Patch Project*, TRUCK deviated substantially from its normal approach to fulfilling this mandate: in the place of the annual open call, a specific call-

⁷³ While all art utilizes "media," digital, electronic, video, telematic and web-based projects formerly known as *new media* have successfully annexed the term and are currently identified as *media arts*.

⁷⁴ The New Gallery (TNG) and Stride are the other two A.R.C.s located in Calgary's downtown. Emmedia, located just outside of the urban core, has the co-operative structure of an artist-run centre and presents some public programmes but it mainly serves as a technical and production facility for media arts.

⁷⁵ From "About TRUCK," *TRUCK* gallery website www.truck.ca/?maj=2abouttruck&min=0abouttruck 16 November 2010. (n.p.).

for-proposals was developed and disseminated, and instead of planning to exhibit the chosen works in either of its conventional venues, an alternative presentation venue was developed. The call for proposals invited applicants to submit projects that presented art as a participatory activity. Analogous to workshops, ideal projects would be designed to make contemporary art practice an accessible activity for a wide range of participants; the chosen works would shift the audience's experience of art from one of interacting with a finished product to taking part in a productive process. Embroidered 'patches,' inspired by the Boy Scouts' penchant for signifying development and accomplishment through a physical emblem, would be awarded to acknowledge the audience's participation and experience as "artists." Rather than hosting these workshops at its usual downtown venues, TRUCK envisioned traveling to a number of festivals and setting up a temporary alternative site where audiences that might not otherwise be interested in contemporary art could be found. To travel to these alternate locales and seek out these potential participants, TRUCK acquired a 1975 Dodge Empress motor home (or camper) that they named the Contemporary Art Mobile Public Exhibition Rig (or CAMPER).⁷⁶ Envisioning the workshop as a more experiential and creative introduction to contemporary art, and CAMPER as a portable venue able to go to where potential audiences might be located, TRUCK's *The Patch Project* was a way to bring "art to the public and the public to art."⁷⁷

First presented in the summer and fall of 2006, *The Patch Project* was revived in 2007 and 2008. Five workshops were presented in the first and second years, while the

⁷⁶ Details throughout this paragraph are from "About CAMPER," TRUCK gallery website (n.pag.). www.truck.ca/?maj=12camper&min=0camper 18 November 2010.

⁷⁷ This quote is from *The Patch Project*'s promotional material, courtesy of TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary's archives.

final year featured six. In the initial year, established arts and cultural festivals hosted the one-day long workshops. In the subsequent years, other locations were explored and CAMPER even completed a roadtrip to participate in the 2008 Banff Culture Walk. Over the span of three years, there was a slow but distinct change in the curatorial mandate as other presentational models complemented the workshop emphasis.⁷⁸ The workshop, however, best illustrates the potential of *The Patch Project* and suggests how it offered a very fluid authorial experience to its participants. Within this structure, recuperated and remediated art practices provided clear examples for creative exploration. Discursively introduced, such techniques and goals served as definite methods and flexible means to experientially understand contemporary art practice. It is also worth noting that within this presentational structure, the relationship between the artist and the participant was initiated under the assumption of capability. In place of Kester's "orthopedic" motivation, the workshops facilitated by TRUCK assumed that prospective participants were not in need of cognitive re-calibration, but were able to flourish within this creative milieu.

This presumed capability might seem at odds with the connotations of the "patch" that the participants "earned" to designate the change in status from consumers to producers of culture. Admittedly, the context of development seems implicit in the choice of the Patch as a signifying emblem; after all, the Boy Scouts utilize its merit badges to signify skills developed and awarded rank badges to demonstrate its boy members' standing within its hierarchically structured organization (Mechling 90). The Boy Scouts, however, do also award "temporary patches" that may "commemorate an event" such as

⁷⁸ Even in the first year, the "workshop" was not the consistent form. The final project of the 2006 programme, *Spread the Love: an Army of Video Lovers Cannot Fail*, did not introduce a creative practice, but was instead a curatorial exercise that screened a series of submitted videos.

the recent completion of a specific hike or to signify participation at a particular “camporee” (129). Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the curatorial agenda that envisioned the patch as a means towards providing the combined project with greater thematic unity and the individual workshops that provided experiences of creative engagement. The artists Terrance Houle, Wednesday Lupypciw and The Ministry of Walking all recuperated and re-presented very idiosyncratic creative templates designed to introduce its participants to such experiences as socio-political critique, co-operative communalism, and alternative urbanism. As such, their workshops did not present conventional artistic skills per se but introduced creative perspectives and provided tangible examples of how creativity responds to a given situation or opportunity. The patches, instead of representing accomplishment and the remediation of a skill deficit, like those of the Boy Scouts, commemorate an event and signify participation in a creative experience and, like a travel memento,⁷⁹ acted as a catalyst that might spark recollections of how creativity responds to given circumstances. This notion of travel and the memento should be kept in mind because CAMPER enabled a great mobility and the various *Patch* projects were presented at an array of festivals and cultural sites that attracted a prospective audience of willing and capable participants.

⁷⁹ In a personal interview (15 November 2006), TRUCK Gallery’s then Programming Director, Jason de Haan, equated the patches to embroidered location emblems that travelers might collect as souvenirs of the different locales they have visited. This personal interview was originally conducted as part of the research for a paper submitted to my Performance Studies 601 class and under ethics approval for that class. I owe special thanks to Jason de Haan for renewing and extending his permission to use that interview material within this dissertation.

Accessible Media: The Workshop as Invitation to Participate

The Patch Project was in part based upon a notion of art being an accessible experience, and while the artists involved re-configured their own creative perspectives as the accessible media for creative experiences, this accessibility was also enabled by TRUCK's choice of venues for the various workshops.⁸⁰ Presented at the Calgary Arts & Tattoo Festival, for example, Terrance Houle's *Paper Bag Tribal Suit* was delivered to an audience that had an interest in exploring how identity is constructed through self-representation and that had gathered at a fair designed to celebrate the practice of bodily adornment, re-design and augmentation. Houle's project cleverly reconstituted and reconfigured his concerns with tribal identification and cultural stereotyping, and was specifically designed to "investigate the roles, histories and contemporary understandings of traditional tattooing."⁸¹ To lead his workshop Houle appeared as "Runs Downtown," an urbanized First Nations identity that the artist has assumed in a number of videos and interventions. To draw attention to hackneyed characterizations of race, Houle satirically asserted his traditional heritage by wearing mass-produced, dollarstore "Indian" garb, while he invited his participants to construct their "own" tribal identities through a *Paper Bag Tribal Suit*. Using brown-paper grocery bags and felt-tipped markers the participants were invited to design a pseudo-skin that could be decorated with "traditional tribal tattoo designs." Via the workshop structure the participants were efficiently introduced to the visual signifiers that distinguish racial difference and by constructing a tribal suit, the

⁸⁰ Part of *The Patch Project*'s efficacy seemed to depend upon location, and this choice was one of the authorial functions that TRUCK fulfilled through its curatorial mandate.

⁸¹ From the invitational/promotional postcard for *Paper Bag Tribal Suit*, courtesy of TRUCK archive. Unless otherwise noted, all cited materials relating to Houle are from this resource.

participants echoed the satirically racialized identity modeled by Houle.⁸² While the process was incredibly simple in terms of materials and skills, its accessibility belies the sophistication of the project's implications. Houle encouraged the participants to literally inhabit another perspective: by briefly embodying and performing an alternative identity the participant might begin to perceive the problematics of visual signification and racial identification.

While the participant most obviously emulated and fulfilled the creative example of Houle's satirical performance of cultural identification as she or he donned the paper bag "suit," the "decoration" of the suit with "tribal" insignia also provided the participant with insight into the process of creative response. Instead of rigidly enforcing some criteria for the tattoo decorations, Houle offered the example of tattoo signification and the opportunity to explore alternative cultural signification. The participant might respond to this particular opportunity as they saw fit, perhaps referring to iconography related to his or her individual cultural heritage or developing insignia that imagined new cultural identities and affiliations.⁸³ The technique of developing individual iconography suggests how Houle's recuperated and re-mediated example served as the medium that the audience applied to their own inventive response. The flexibility of this responsive creativity is not solely an attribute of Houle's, but one that many of *The Patch Project* artists demonstrate. Instead of asserting proprietary rights or claiming ownership of these

⁸² The TRUCK archives contain a diagram for the step-by-step construction of the *Tribal Suit*. The caption reveals Houle's satirical intent and concludes by asserting that, "you are a proud owner of your very own Tribal paper bag suit custom made to fit you(r) Individual need(s) or (to) start your own Tribe."

⁸³ Anecdotal accounts describe a group of motorcycle club members (or, pejoratively, "bikers") that participated and decorated their suits with hybrid imagery informed by both motorcycle gang insignia and traditional First Nations motifs.

creative methods, the artists involved in the various projects openly shared, and made accessible, these techniques.

The choice of venue for the *Paper Bag Tribal Suit* workshop provided both a particularly apt site for an interrogation of contemporary body arts and an ideal audience for Houle's recuperation and re-presentation of his creative perspectives. Organized to respond to the resurgence of interest in tattooing, body-piercing and alternative lifestyles, the Calgary Arts & Tattoo Festival was directed at a specialized audience. These potential participants were likely already familiar with a creative process that constantly revisits and reconfigures both traditional cultural identifications and standardized representations for contemporary re-use; moreover, such contemporary alternative sub-cultures often appropriate and re-deploy pre-existing representations to assert individuality and/or to claim affiliation with identifiable cultural identities. Houle's creative gesture reminds us of the genesis of such recurrent fads and stresses that the cultures that initially developed a mode of representation and identification are often effaced when a tattoo motif or piercing is absorbed into mass-culture and re-fashioned as a contemporary insignia. Although it is impossible to judge the impact of this critique upon the participants, the audience that took the time to construct a paper bag tribal suit was a very astute target for such an undertaking, and had a great potential to embrace the offer of creative participation. With an audience interested in practices such as tattooing, piercing and scarification, there was a pre-existing collapse of the gap between the artist and the audience. The bodies of the audience, in many cases, had already served as the surfaces for creative adornment; instead of that iconography being executed at the exclusive discretion of an artist, the audience is often a collaborative consultant contributing to the

development of the iconography that adorns their bodies. Thus, Houle's project accessed previously extant creative capacities and provided a fresh context for their practice.

While it might seem that the *Paper Bag Tribal Suit* was directed at an audience with a pre-existing interest and involvement in a specific type creative culture, bodily adornment and augmentation, it is difficult to imagine an audience that would be totally lacking in previous creative experiences. Instead of a clear and unwavering distinction between the creative and the consumptive classes, membership and affiliation moves back and forth—an individual may be part of an audience even though they would normally self-identify as an artist. Likewise, even those that possess great skill or creative experience might be reluctant to claim the title of artist for himself or herself. Wednesday Lupypciw's *Handi Crafts, Handy Cats* illustrates this very issue as a number of its participants turned out to possess well-developed skills or were already creative artists. Like Houle's efforts to draw attention to the problematic appropriation of First Nations' iconography, Lupypciw's project pointed towards the persistent marginalization of "craft" within the contemporary art field. As with *Paper Bag Tribal Suit*, Lupypciw's workshop also benefited from an insightful choice of presentation contexts. Launched at Calgary's Artcity, a festival "dedicated to enhancing the public's experience and enjoyment of contemporary visual arts, architecture and design,"⁸⁴ *Handi Crafts, Handy Cats* brought attention to a type of creative engagement that was not an acknowledged part of the festival's mandate. The absence of craft from Artcity's privileged practices is especially interesting considering that the Alberta College of Art & Design, Calgary's largest post-secondary art institution, has a significant craft emphasis with program areas

⁸⁴ From "About Artcity," on Artcity's website. www.artcityfestival.com/about 22 November 2010.

in Ceramics, Glass, Jewellery and Fibre.⁸⁵ Despite the significance of these practices within Calgary's creative community, Artcity's mandate re-inscribes the long-standing schism between art and craft. With CAMPER located on Calgary's Olympic Plaza, Lupyciw had a great opportunity to have her craft-informed project intervene into the very heart of the festival, assert craft's contemporary cultural relevance and "enhance" the audience's *participatory* "experience and enjoyment" of creative crafting.

Lupyciw's workshop aimed to explore "the quintessential clutter and excessiveness of hobby craft culture,"⁸⁶ and CAMPER was loaded with a vast array of materials and tools. While Lupyciw was prepared to introduce a wide-range of techniques from knitting and crocheting to pipe-cleaner sculpture, documentary photos of the event suggest that many participants embraced woolworks and attempted to produce garments and apparel. Throughout the workshop, Lupyciw's expertise was secondary to the creative milieu constituted by the event; in place of a clear distinction between the artist as source and the participants as recipients of knowledge and experience, she envisioned an alternative pedagogy where skills and techniques might be freely shared among the participants.⁸⁷ Despite awful weather on the day of the event, *Handi Crafts, Handy Cats* attracted some fifty participants. One woman embraced the open pedagogical format and shared her considerable crocheting skills with her fellow crafters.⁸⁸ While

⁸⁵ Coincidentally, both Lupyciw and Houle graduated from the college's Fibre programme.

⁸⁶ From the invitational/promotional postcard for *Handi Crafts, Handy Cats*, courtesy of TRUCK archive.

⁸⁷ From the invitational/promotional postcard for *Handi Crafts, Handy Cats*, courtesy of TRUCK archive.

⁸⁸ From a personal interview with Lupyciw (22 November 2006). Like the de Haan interview cited above, this interview was originally conducted a part of the research for a paper submitted to my Performance Studies 601 class and under ethics approval for that

other *Patch* workshops featured relatively short encounters, many visitors returned throughout the day to continue the projects that they had begun during the morning coffee-break, while the crochet-savvy participant apparently stayed for a couple of hours. Lupypchiw's approach re-mediated craft as an accessible practice, one that offered vast possibilities regardless of skill-level; the workshop's convivial and sociable milieu invited extended and repeated engagement. Whereas Bourriaud suggests that the open forum of relational art practices invites this sort of engagement, the participatory aspect of Lupypchiw's workshop provided an example of how an audience might be given first a reason to engage and then a milieu that encouraged the continuation of that engagement. The openness of the purpose and the concrete goals of completing the craft-project seemed to provide the initiative needed for the audience to take the chance to spend some time and explore the latent creativity lodged in the humblest of materials and techniques.

In the place of a progressive view of culture that privileges signature gestures and innovation (such as those implicit with both avant-gardism and Modernism), *Handi Crafts, Handy Cats* revived traditional working methods and demonstrated the continuing validity of previously established standards. Working with time-proven methods, participants were not required to respond with an innovative art object or image, but only to explore a familiar and accessible method. In such a situation, the practice of crochet explored by the participant mentioned above was not a means to an end, but an end in itself—it might have been used to create a work that the participant might have taken pride in, but it was also important as a practice that could be revisited after the workshop

class. I owe special thanks to Wednesday Lupypchiw for renewing and extending her permission to use that interview material within this dissertation. Unless otherwise noted, insights throughout this section were developed in response to this conversation.

was completed. While crocheting is an identifiable skill, not all the techniques available to the participants featured that degree of sophistication: indeed, some of the techniques resembled the sort of pursuits introduced in grade school art classes. Even though the methods introduced might be straightforward, and innovation was not the prime goal of the workshop, the workshop's fluid structure allowed participants the room to creatively subvert the purported "craft" to yield unexpected works of art. Accessing decorative art techniques that might normally be utilized to adorn an everyday item like a facial tissue box, one participant devised a clever decorative "vagina" that featured frilly fringes and sequins. While this particular participant was an artist, in the milieu of Lupypciw's workshop she had the opportunity to try a new way of working even as she brought to that creative methodology a particularly critical perspective not commonly associated with the production of craftwork. While the workshop illustrated the on-going validity of established creative practices it also suggested that, through re-iteration, common working methods may gain critical currency and renewed relevance. In such a case not only does the audience member gain insight into a particular form of creative production, but the creative method also achieves a new applicability—combined these benefits reinvigorate the field of cultural production at the grassroots level.

The Patch Project's re-iterative methodologies not only provided the benefits of the introduction of tangible skills (as was the case with Lupypciw's workshop) and of critical perspectives (in the case of Houle's presentation), it also reconstituted the most commonplace and mundane activities as art practices worthy of the audience's engagement. In the place of lofty themes and the mastery of advanced artistic techniques, The Ministry of Walking invited participants to take part in an ambulatory performance.

Presented at the Afrikadey! Festival, The Ministry's *Postcard Project* featured a number of pre-designed "walking activities" that a participant could undertake; subsequently, the participant could record their experiences upon a postcard and return post it to The Ministry. The organization, a "loosely knit collective of artists and activists dedicated to the promotion of perambulatory activities," investigates the "activity of walking as a vital and integral part of their everyday life, work, and artistic practice."⁸⁹ In contrast to the workshops delivered by Houle and Lupypciw, which had a definite resonance with their hosting festival, The Ministry encouraged its participants to venture beyond the specific locale of the Afrikadey! site and test the applicability of its ideas throughout the wider cityscape. Instead of merely being a method for reaching some destination, the programmed walks stressed an experiential process enabled by attentive mobility. When the participants returned their postcards to the Ministry, "for archiving purposes," the patch signifying participation was mailed to them.

While The Ministry quite directly absorbed the human activity of walking as a medium for a creative experience, its notion of purposeful and attentive urban perambulation recuperated the *dérive* theorized by Guy Debord and practiced by the Situationist International. For Debord, the *dérive* (or drift) was a form of embodied urban research that involved "playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects," whose goal might be "to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself." While the practice might provide insight through "personal disorientation" (Debord, n.pag.), the Ministry seemed to look towards re-orientation as

⁸⁹ From "Postcard Project." CAMPER on-line archive. *TRUCK* Website. www.truck.ca/index.php?action=view&exnumber=146 9 December 2010.

they encouraged the participant to freshly experience the familiar. To encourage this enlightened perspective the walks invited participants to follow a series of simple directives that would govern the participants' movements and negotiation of space. The notion of continually turning to either the left or the right might spiral the engaged walker through an unexpected sequence of impressions that contrasted with that participant's accustomed experience of a given locale, but the work presented—or, rather, suggested—by The Ministry was not so much a concrete practice as a nascent potentiality poised on the edge of actuality as it is passed from the presenting artists to the audience. Like the Fluxus Event Score or Allan Kaprow's never-realized plan to develop the "Happening-by-mail," the programmed walk suggests that the work of art is not a discrete entity but a fluid process, an authorial project initiated by one party and open to continuation and completion by one or more subsequent "authors."

This open form of authorship imagines that authorship is an identity that is not necessarily achieved through the development of a specialized skill, but as a position that is available to the willing and that is occupied through practice. It is also an especially appropriate creative strategy for a collective like The Ministry of Walking;⁹⁰ in place of authorship residing in a single individual, collectives accommodate and integrate multiple authors. Like the urban environment that is its subject, The Ministry acts as a complex melting pot of perspectives, each contributing to the whole. In dispersing the creative identity of "author" through a collective persona and by reconstituting the everyday practice of walking as a creative medium, The Ministry of Walking suggested the

⁹⁰ The promotional postcard distributed by TRUCK lists nine then-current members. The group's website now lists fifteen members. www.ministryofwalking.ca 30 November 2010.

simplicity and accessibility of creative engagement. By providing the audience with only the most basic directives and making the “workshop” a mere distribution outlet where the project was verbally introduced and the postcards circulated, however, the idea of the workshop became tenuous. As well, the “creative experience” that *The Postcard Project* artists were allegedly offering was almost impossible to locate. When the participants scattered to undertake the Situationist-like walks, they took on the responsibility for fulfilling the authorial opportunity; despite the framework provided by The Ministry’s suggestions, these experiences of creativity were essentially *self-authored*.

By facilitating the audience’s increasing autonomy The Ministry seemed to cease to function as artists and within this vacated authorial situation the audience found the opportunity for a creative experience of urban mobility. Emulating the practices of the Situationists and The Ministry, the audience (however briefly) acted as *artists* and experienced the world as creative potentiality. By responding to the opportunity and subsequently accounting for their engagement through the returnable postcard, the participants asserted their identities as artists and further shifted The Ministry from an authorial to a curatorial role. Unlike other workshops in the initial year of *The Patch Project*, The Ministry had described its role in curatorial terms.⁹¹ As art critic Jennifer Allen has pointed out, the Latin root, *curare*, “to care,” informs the practice of “curation” and “curators take care of things that do not belong to them” (144). Disseminating the flexible and adaptable templates for perambulatory activity, The Ministry did not practice authorship but provided its participants with the opportunity to access and experience it.

⁹¹ The promotional postcard distributed by TRUCK describes the event as “curated by” The Ministry of Walking. *The Patch Project*’s curated programme of videos included in *The Patch Project, Spread the Love: an Army of Video Lovers Cannot Fail*, was curiously credited to artist Anthea Black.

Those audience members that took advantage of The Ministry's offer and performed the suggested activity authored the idea through concrete action and took ownership of that specific experience. If the engaged walker subsequently took the time to record the experience upon the postcard and return it to the Ministry of Walking, The Ministry, as curators of *The Postcard Project*, were obligated to archive and take care of an experience that belonged to someone else. While curatorial practice has been extensively critiqued in earlier chapters, The Ministry's curatorial perspective seems remarkably open and egalitarian, their agenda appears to support the creative efforts of all those who participated in their project and (however briefly) inhabited the role of "artist."

TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary's stated goal for *The Patch Project* was to bring "art to the public and the public to art." Such an aim was developed because, as a cultural organization, TRUCK realized the limitations of conventional art exhibitions and gallery venues. As it reconceived how art might be presented and how it might function, TRUCK likewise altered the way that it conceived of its audience. In the place of an audience that only observes and comprehends the work of art, the project assumed that its audience was capable of participating within the creative process. As it embraced the invitation to take part in fashioning a paper bag tribal suit, exploring divergent crafting, or undertaking a perambulatory *derive*, the audience blurred the distinct line separating its own identity from that of an artist. Many of the activities presented within *The Patch Project* illustrate how artists may re-conceive both their own and other previously established creative practices as a medium that can be shared with a participatory audience. As they employed these mediums, the audience's experience of creative engagement illustrated the availability of the authorial role and the accessibility of the

cultural field, suggesting that creativity is a shared, not a specialist, domain.

Unfortunately it is difficult to imagine how many members of the participating audience began to re-conceive of themselves as artists, the only verifiable data is the number of patches distributed in recognition of each participant's engagement in the differing events. While TRUCK's project in part bridged the gap between art and the public, the recuperative techniques employed within many of *The Patch Project's* workshops in part bridges the distinction between artist and audience and demonstrated the accessibility of creativity to its audience of potential participants and nascent artists.

Imaginary Ordinary: Recuperating the Deer Head Café

The blurring of the identities of artists and audiences that transpired within *The Patch Project* occurred because the artists involved in the project assumed that creativity was not a specialist domain but an accessible practice that the audience was capable of engaging. This non-hierarchical ideal is one that encourages the widest possible participation in the field of art and makes the role of artist accessible to a vast array of audiences. Such an ideal obviously designates "artist" as a privileged identity, but instead of such esteem being the result of pre-existing ability or specialized skill, I contend that it is the experience of creativity and engagement as an "artist" that lend the identity value and suggest its benefits should be accessible regardless of any prior aptitude or nascent skill. Such a revision of a once exclusive identity is especially evident in *Imaginary Ordinary: A Community-Mapping Project* (May 8 through August 29, 2009).⁹² Devised

⁹² This section is an extensive revision of my introduction, "Happening Just North of Downtown Up Centre Street: Reconnaissance and Reconfiguration in *Imaginary Ordinary's* Community-Mapping Project," which was published in the *Imaginary*

by Eric Moschopedis and developed with “his accomplice”⁹³ Laura Leif,⁹⁴ *Imaginary Ordinary* looked beyond the standard venues of cultural engagement, such as galleries, museums, and city-designated “cultural sectors.” Establishing its base of operations in a street-level storefront located on Calgary’s Centre Street, *Imaginary Ordinary*’s theatre of operations consisted of the communities of Crescent Heights, Regal Terrace and Renfrew, a string of abutted neighbourhoods north of the city’s downtown core. The base was a nexus for shared experience and served as an alternative community centre, classroom and “lending library.” It also served as a mustering point for off-site investigations where many individual and group explorations of the community began and where countless discussions developed when groups of participants re-convened. Unlike the daylong *Patch Project* workshops presented in conjunction with festivals, *Imaginary Ordinary*’s base afforded the project a greater opportunity to nurture an on-going relationship with its audience. Through an array of activities, the example provided by the space was available for an extended period of time and offered its audience an on-going invitation to explore and creatively respond to the physical terrain and the social practices that together constituted the project’s imagined community.

Imaginary Ordinary extensively recuperated and re-configured a number of creative practices that Moschopedis had initially investigated as part of his Master of Fine

Ordinary: a Community-Mapping Project monograph. Special thanks to Eric Moschopedis for his permission to use this material for my dissertation.

⁹³ From the “About” page of *Imaginary Ordinary*’s website. 20 November 2010. <http://imaginaryordinary.wordpress.com/about/>

⁹⁴ Both Moschopedis and Leif were involved with *The Patch Project*. Leif was a member of the collective *The Drawing Party* (2007) and Moschopedis collaborated with Mia Rushton on *Zs by the C* (2008).

Arts research at the University of British Columbia (Okanagan). During the tenure of his Masters research Moschopedis developed the identity of the “tourist” as a research methodology. Wandering Kelowna on foot, Moschopedis would collect relevant specimens and interesting experiences which he recorded as a series of “short, descriptive, self-reflexive texts, or ‘postcards’” (Moschopedis 39) to Kelowna. Comparing this initial practice to a “monologue” (39), Moschopedis subsequently developed a more responsive postcard format that invited a dispersed and elusive audience to engage in dialogue with him. “As a means of dissemination,” Moschopedis “left the cards at coffee houses, restaurants, social assistance centres, tourist bureaus, senior citizen community halls, art galleries, municipal buildings,” (40) and he even handed them out to individuals that he met during his perambulatory wanderings. While the implication was that the audience might respond in any manner that they saw fit, the *Deer Head Café Postcard* series also featured suggested activities, such as: “Write something encouraging,” “Describe the last time you traveled,” and “Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper” (61). Like The Ministry of Walking’s earlier postcard project, Moschopedis invited a response that he could collect via the postage-paid postcards. These open yet direct invitations to participate resembled the sort of undertakings I describe as demonstrating Fluid Authority and indeed Moschopedis suggests just such a motivation: “Not unlike Flux-kits created in the 1960s by artists who belonged to the Fluxus movement, *Deer Head Café Postcard* sought to relinquish artistic authority and democratize creative activity by inviting everyone to be an artist” (39).

This desire to “relinquish artistic authority” is one we will see in Fluid Authority, as is Moschopedis’ attempt to invite “everyone to be an artist.” Indeed, Moschopedis’

fluid notion of “artistic” identities and his interest in making available opportunities to participate in the cultural field were also evident in his establishment of a temporary venue, the Deer Head Café. The Café was located within the heart of Kelowna’s Cultural District within the Artist-in-Residence Studio at Alternator Gallery for Contemporary Art. The location was in the city centre and participants that took part in the *Postcard* project could visit the venue “to share tea and cookies” (31), partake in informal discussion and view the displayed responses that other participants had submitted. During this latter phase of the project, Moschopedis distributed a series of posters that invited the viewer to respond to a series of printed propositions. *Your Assignment* offered five different experiences, structured as instructions. When the audience accepted the invitation and completed a creative response they could submit it to the Café, where they were collectively displayed. By going through these steps, the participant performed the sort of actions commonly undertaken by artists—recognizing a creative opportunity, responding to the stimuli of a particular context, executing the work and finally publicly disseminating the results. In the case of both the *Deer Head Café Postcard* series and the venue, creativity was re-presented as a participatory forum, not a spectatorial offering. Rather than either of these projects being innovative undertakings, Moschopedis stressed that *Your Assignment* essentially recuperated Fluxus’s “instructions” (44) and Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher’s *Learning to Love You More*, the instruction-based series of suggested creative challenges that each feature simple directions and clear goals. The on-line archive of “assignments” commenced in 2002 and attracted some 8000 participatory

responses by the time the site closed in 2009. Such a response suggests how making creativity accessible can enable extensive participation.⁹⁵

The model established by Moschopedis throughout his graduate studies was extensively recuperated for *Imaginary Ordinary*. To concentrate its participants' creative attention and awareness, *Imaginary Ordinary* offered a "mapping" process that echoes the sort of attentive and responsive experience of the urban milieu he explored in *Your Assignment* and the *Deer Head Café Postcard* series. Combining reconnaissance and reconfiguration, mapping draws upon sustained observation, careful measurement and scrupulous data collection. By providing the means to more attentively experience everyday life it counters our often-habitual inattentiveness. The mapping process encouraged participants to encounter the community's familiar terrain anew while it supplied methods for being acutely aware of the nuances of their experiences. The experiential value of these reconnaissance engagements was a vital aspect of *Imaginary Ordinary*, but the project also proposed to make these ephemeral and transient encounters more permanent, durable and shareable. To explore this possibility, the project engaged cartographic reconfiguration, where the data and knowledge of experience could be translated, categorized and archived so that it was legible to, and retrievable by, subsequent participants. Displayed within the physical site and throughout the temporal duration of *Imaginary Ordinary*, these documents provided intriguing examples of the participants' attention—what they were attentive to, how they were attentive—and

⁹⁵ *Learning How to Love You More* website. www.learningtoloveyoumore.com. 2 December 2010. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art acquired the website in 2009, "ensuring that *Learning to Love You More* will continue to exist online as an archive of the project."

demonstrated how subsequent participants might, too, be attentive to that which often goes unnoticed.

To ascertain what often went unobserved and unacknowledged throughout the community's physical terrain, the project offered weekly collective reconnaissance experiences, the "Urban Wanderers" nights. These evenings, essentially recuperated the "Kelowna's Club of Urban Wanderers" that Moschopedis and visual artist Mia Rushton had initiated during his time in Kelowna (Moschopedis 33) and resembled the activities of The Ministry of Walking. Instead of the "programmed" walks of that organization's *Postcard Project*, the group "wandered" without pre-determined routes or definite destinations. The idea of leader and led quickly evaporated as the group traveled as interest dictated, through both familiar streets and less consciously visited spaces like back alleys and parking lots. When they came across a space or place that merited comment, the wanderers shared memories and recollections provoked by the specifics of the locale—a familiar house or crossroads might cause a spontaneous discourse to occur as the participants recounted their story of a particular site. Whereas Kester's dialogical art model would suggest that this sort of dialogue was the medium for the participatory creative experience, dialogue in the case of the Urban Wanderer evenings was just one of several experiences produced by this specific type of collective urban movement. As the participants shared their experiences and memories they contributed to the collective creative experience and served as important performers within the evening's performance of reconnaissance. Instead of being an audience that observed an authority's account of the neighbourhood's attributes, each of the ambulatory participants had the opportunity to contribute to the unpredictable narrative of community that developed through aleatory

and coincidental means. By taking part in these discussions, the participants authored the improvised evening's experience and blurred the distinct roles of artist and audience.

Like The Ministry of Walking's *Postcard Project*, the Urban Wanderer events echoed the *dérive* articulated by Debord. In the place of the unpredictably pre-programmed journeys that The Ministry used to subvert habitual and unconscious movement through urban space, *Imaginary Ordinary*'s wanderings more closely resembled the uncertain drifting practiced by the Situationists. Although Debord claimed that the process worked best with a small number of participants and assessed that "[w]ith more than four or five participants, the specifically *dérive* character rapidly diminishes, and in any case it is impossible for there to be more than ten or twelve people without the *dérive* fragmenting into several simultaneous *dérives*" (n.pag.), the Urban Wanderer events regularly attracted at least five or more participants. While the Situationist example might be detectable in the gesture, *Imaginary Ordinary*'s recuperation of Debord's example was reconfigured for, and reapplied within, significantly different contexts. Instead of attempting to resist the controlling structures of the urban environment, the Urban Wanderers approached the city as a source of wonder and interest.

Rather than these recuperated *dérives* being solely ephemeral actions, the Urban Wanderer events integrated the practice of research and documentation directly into the projects so that while the "performance" of urban drifting might disappear and leave only memories, the performer had the opportunity to preserve the materials that might stand-in for those lost experiences. As the group unpredictably advanced on foot, the intriguing detritus of urban life often arrested the wanderers' attention. Obscure fragments of refuse

and curious bits of disused matter were collected as “specimens” of the evening’s journey or the particularity of a site. Upon returning from the off-site excursion, the participants were introduced to methods for organizing and re-presenting their accumulated community samplings. Analyzing the different relationships and resonances suggested by the amassed material, the participants determined an organizing principle. Selecting which collected materials best represented the evening’s experience and the encountered terrain, the participants preserved the chosen remnants upon pre-printed display card templates. Featuring between three and ten windows for the display of the physical specimens, the prepared forms also offered lined spaces where relevant data could be recorded. One completed work featured a collection of shiny objects that would make any crowd envious, another attempted to identify the brands of recovered cigarette butts, while a third acknowledged and preserved a collection of “purple things.” Framed and exhibited on the walls of the *Imaginary Ordinary* site, these collections combined to form a humble but intriguing record of the unexpected possibilities that attention afforded. While *Imaginary Ordinary* provided a choice of templates and organizing methods, re-configuring the evening’s material remnants was the audience’s creative responsibility. By fulfilling this role, the audience ceased to function as we might normally anticipate; by using the methods of categorization, selection and composition, the participant organized and re-presented the materials of their experience, a practice not dissimilar to the way that many artists conceive creative practice.

D.I.Y. Kits: Recuperating Creativity and Community

In contrast to the group experiences of the Urban Wanderer evenings, *Imaginary Ordinary* also offered some very individualized and self-actuating explorations of creativity through a series of bright yellow, “do-it-yourself” kits. Recuperating the idea of the Fluxus-kit, July and Fletcher’s instructional art examples, and Kaprow’s *Self-Service*, each kit contained instructions and the tools necessary for a specific creative experience. Organized like a lending library, participants could borrow the kits and venture off to experience individual creativity. If one desired a leisurely and sedentary activity, the kit designed to enable cloud drawing might be chosen. Finding a suitable vantage point the participant could observe the cloud formations above the city, and choose to either attempt to scrupulously record those ever-shifting shapes or intuitively translate them into unexpected associative imagery. If the participant had long been bothered by areas of urban space in need of a greater variety of foliage, then they could select the kit containing all that was needed to plant a “guerrilla” flower garden. If one had always admired a particular person in the community and desired an opportunity to engage that person in conversation, then the “Interview Yer Neighbour Kit” (sic) could be chosen. Armed with a stack of suggested questions and pad for recording the subject’s responses, the kit provided simple but accessible means to start a conversation and learn about the perspectives and experiences of the people that made up the community.

Like the walks programmed by The Ministry of Walking, the “do-it-yourself” kits shifted a great deal of creative responsibility to the audience. While they were provided with instructions and suggestions, once the participants left *Imaginary Ordinary*’s base of operations, the kit could be used as the borrower saw fit. This was especially evident in

the case of two young girls. Borrowing the filmmaking kit that included a video camera and a brief script, *Dictionary Tom & The Mystery of Gary McPherson*, written by local screenwriter Ethan Cole, the girls decided not to follow the script provided. Instead, they responded with unexpected creativity and impulsively re-scripted the anticipated activity by deciding to videograph themselves as they wandered the neighbourhood acting silly. As they turned the camera upon each other, they seized the opportunity to be both the subjects and the authors of their creative collaboration; while they did not follow the kit's directions, the kit's contents granted the pair the license to explore a creative opportunity. By impulsively improvising their alternative film, these young women creatively subverted the example provided by *Imaginary Ordinary* and demonstrated the sort of self-determination and engagement that is often associated with the identity of "artist." Rather than having to renounce their own opportunity for authorship by filming the provided script, the girls re-secured authorship by refusing to fulfill the obligations inferred by the DIY kit's contents and authoring a totally unforeseen and unpredictable experience for themselves and for the audience that was able to view the results of their subversive creative gesture.

While the kits provided the audience with access to a creative experience they also were a means to engage with the community in unexpected ways. Instead of experience by rote, the kits provided an intensifying lens that heightened the user's sense of focus. "The Bird Watching Kit" enabled the user's observation of the area's avian inhabitants. Armed with binoculars, a sketchbook and a book about Alberta birds, the kit supplied a range of ways of engaging with the subject, whether the participant simply observed the birds for pleasure, or took the time to record their appearance and/or learn

more about the species' particulars. As well, "The Interview Yer Neighbour Kit" furnished the user with the means to engage in discussion and learn more about the personalities and experiences that are part of our immediate environment. Although the role of "learning" in these kits may seem to suggest that the participants suffered from some deficiency and required remedial training, the pedagogical structure in actuality was a way of problematizing habitual perceptions and looking at the world with renewed appreciation.

The interview kit also provided a way to generate dialogue and discussion, so that rather than the roles of audience/author/subject creating an isolating distance between identities, the format devised by *Imaginary Ordinary* allowed an open discourse to develop between the community's members. Whereas discussion and debate were the *medium* in Kester's dialogical art model, it was what was produced throughout the duration of *Imaginary Ordinary*. While it never claimed that it would provide the sort of concrete results and social improvements that Kester values, the medium of recuperated creative templates and reconfigured past practices evident in the DIY kits yielded the additional benefit of social engagement and a heightened sense of being part of a community. While this sort of sociability was an important aspect of *Imaginary Ordinary* and might seem to align it with relational art practices, it should not overshadow the project's exploration of recuperative art practice and its efforts to provide access to creative participation. Whereas works associated with Relational Aesthetics often accommodate the presence and the interaction of the audience, those projects' open-ended and indeterminate structures differ greatly from the more concisely defined experiences and more clearly articulated creative goals facilitated by the DIY kits. As the

first chapter registered its concern about the pervasive influence of Bourriaud's theoretical model, it is important to distinguish between these two forms. Even though *Imaginary Ordinary* facilitated an awareness of community and a sense of social engagement within a specific neighbourhood, one of its identifying features was how it provided access to creative experience and allowed its participants to inhabit the role of artist.

A Capable Audience

Both *Imaginary Ordinary* and TRUCK's *Patch Project* recuperated established creative works and working methods; these were then re-deployed as the medium for the audience's experience of creative authorship. As they participated as authors and producers, the audience took part in cultural discourse and contributed to the on-going dialogue that continually renews, reconfigures and expands the cultural field. While innovation and the setting of new precedents are often assumed to be the way that the cultural field is replenished, the example of re-use, re-configuration and re-application demonstrate the on-going relevance of the field's established standards. This re-use institutes new connections between ideas and fosters a hybridization of existing practices and working methods; under such circumstances innovation is shown not to be a value in and of itself, but a value manifest through utility and on-going adaptability. While "artists" are often engaged in this on-going renovation and re-use of established creative practices, *Imaginary Ordinary* and *The Patch Project* offer this possibility to a wider field of participants. This intervention into what may appear to be a closed and exclusive system suggests that non-specialists may penetrate the cultural field and be active

participants within it. This action may result in the system becoming more inclusive through the widespread participation of a greater number of agents. Although this outcome has yet to be achieved and the impact of the creative efforts described above is relatively small, the example that they provide could make the cultural field more varied and accessible.

The benefit of the practices described throughout this chapter, then, are not just for the audience, but also for the field of creative culture: the audience gains experiential insight into creativity, while the utility of established creative methods are reformulated and renewed. This discussion of “benefits” also points toward the blurred identity of audience and artist within works like *Imaginary Ordinary* and *The Patch Project*. Rather than “artist” being a stable identity secured through the acquisition of specialist skills or the brandishing of talent, the two projects re-conceived of the identity of “artist” as one that might be occupied via practice. As accessing this position provides something of a benefit there seems to be the implication that the audience previously suffered from some *lack* that the artist rectifies, however, this benefit occurs because the projects assume a *capable* audience that is prepared to perform the tasks of creative authorship. If the participant is indeed capable, it is natural to wonder what sort of attributes make them suitable for this artistic engagement; however, it is perhaps more profitable to look at the changed concept of “artist” to understand how this identity has become more available in our contemporary context. Where “talent” and training in specialized skill might once have distinguished the artist from the non-artist, in the twentieth century the notion that “creativity” is at the centre of the artistic identity came into prominence. Instead of this being an exclusive attribute, creativity was perceived to be “the combined innate faculties

of perception and imagination” (de Duve 20) shared by all. As Thierry de Duve suggested when recounting the changing nature of art instruction, “creativity’s” influence spread because of its pervasiveness: “Everybody is endowed with it, and the closer it remains to sheer, blank endowment, the greater is its potential” (20).

While de Duve suggests that in formal art instruction a “French theory” informed *attitude*⁹⁶ has succeeded creativity in the post-secondary training of art students, the sort of capability that the audience demonstrates as it participates in *The Patch Project* and *Imaginary Ordinary* is based upon creativity. Moreover, this creativity is enabled by a more open and flexible view of what the artist does to create works of art. Indeed, rather than composition, colour theory, the recognition of form, the integrity of the medium or familiarity with metaphorical tropes being some of the attributes relevant to contemporary creativity, an artist such as Gabriel Orozco would identify a host of different self-perceptions that enable his creative engagement: “I am the head of a team, a coach, a producer, an organizer, a representative, a cheerleader, a host of the party, a captain of the boat...in short, an activist, an activator, an incubator.”⁹⁷ Many of the skills hinted at by Orozco are quite common and ones that an audience might practice in his or her everyday life and employment career. That they are now useful in the field of art

⁹⁶ In 1994 when “When Form Has Become Attitude—And Beyond” was published, de Duve’s described “Linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, Feminism, structuralism, and post-structuralism” (27), as “French theory.” What de Duve describes as “attitude” would be currently called “criticality” or “critical perspective.” As a former art student during the period that de Duve describes and as a current art instructor, the idea of attitude was the early “doctrinaire” application of “French theory” capable of applying its critical apparatus on the world but perhaps *lacking* self-criticality. The contemporary application of art theory is often more nuanced and self-aware.

⁹⁷ Orozco quoted by Hal Foster in “(Dis)Engaged Art,” (75). Orozco is describing his dual identity as artist-curator, but the range of identities and abilities seems to describe much of the way that creative practice is conceived in the post-studio, socially engaged contemporary art context.

suggests the extent that the identity of “artist” is no longer a specialist designation but one that many are capable of fulfilling. To seize this opportunity, the audience requires opportunity. If participation is indeed becoming a more mandatory standard in contemporary creative art, as Chapter One suggested, then the opportunities will be more prevalent. That chapter, however, did hint at the limitations of participation, so the sort of participation that we promote and privilege should be carefully considered. The type of creative participation that is a part of Fluid Authority was evident in the two Calgary projects described above and it may yet make a profound impact upon the cultural field while it blurs the identities of artist and audience.

Chapter Six: Lead by Example:
Fluid Authority as a Creative Perspective

The last chapter identified participatory art practices that began to offer their audiences the chance to experience creativity. Such creative engagements likewise demonstrated the fluidity of the “artist” identity and suggested how the audience might be able to occupy an authorial position and practice authorship. This sort of creative participation is important because, as earlier chapters have mapped out, participation seems to be becoming an obligatory gesture within the cultural field. Despite my interest in this turn of events, participatory art is not a panacea; while it might provide some social benefit and the opportunity to experience creative potentiality, participation is just as likely to be invoked for other less altruistic motives. Past chapters have recounted how participatory art could be employed to sustain curatorial careers (as was the case with Nicolas Bourriaud and his disciples) or gain credibility through association (like RoseLee Goldberg did with her Performa Festival and Nancy Spector attempted with *theanyspacewhatever* exhibition). I have pursued the notion of Fluid Authority to offset these tendencies and imagine how participatory art practices might facilitate the audience’s experiences of creativity and blur the hierarchical distinction between artists and audiences.

While I obviously possess great enthusiasm for participatory creativity, I am wary of its limitations and drawbacks; as well, I certainly do not want to repeat Bourriaud’s problematic assumption that participation is analogous to democratic engagement. Indeed, while I think that Fluid Authority might provide an example of how obligatory

participation may be challenged so that it allows a creative engagement that might affect the cultural field, it is not a revolutionary creative perspective that can drastically transform or expand the cultural field. Instead, its potential effects parallel its creative example—Fluid Authority renovates the materials at its disposal and, as it does so, it simultaneously revises the cultural field’s pre-existing attributes. As such, Fluid Authority’s potential impact upon the cultural field may seem modest, but over an extended period the field will benefit from its accommodation of an increasingly extensive range of practices and participants. In my discussion of *Imaginary Ordinary* and the projects that were part of TRUCK Contemporary Art’s *The Patch Project* I noted the way that previously established creative examples could be revised and re-deployed to invite participatory engagement and these practices seemed analogous to the perspectives that I imagined were part of Fluid Authority. Linking participation directly to creativity, Fluid Authority aims to make the practice of authorship less privileged and more accessible. Reconstituting established creative exemplars as the medium for new creative experiences, Fluid Authority invites the participant to gain insight into a range of adaptable and re-applicable creative perspectives and techniques.

The concept of Fluid Authority that I am proposing is an opening up of creative practice and an active re-consideration of works of art as a medium that might be deployed to generate new works and, most importantly, creative experiences. Like Allan Kaprow when he attempted to develop methods for inviting the engagement of “committed” participants illustrates, I too struggled to understand what was transpiring in the relationship between works of arts and audiences. Although the past decade has seen a growing interest in participatory art practice in its many guises, within the established

terrain I could not locate a satisfactory account of how the audience is creatively engaged. Because of this “theoretical” gap there seemed to be a number of under-examined practices that might benefit from re-consideration and re-articulation as a distinct creative perspective. Thus, Fluid Authority was not so much *invented* as *recognized*; it was an idea of creative practice recuperated from extant examples and reconfigured to promote audience participation. The explicit combination of the participatory with the creative at Fluid Authority’s core represents a creative renovation, extension and reconfiguration of the cultural field’s previously existing repertoire of possibility. As a form of participatory creativity, Fluid Authority re-calibrates the relationship between the audience and the work of art. It considers participation as an *end* as well as a *means*, not only a means of production, but also what is simultaneously produced. Essentially, where participation had been imagined as an avenue towards sociopolitical emancipation (by Bourriaud in a fleeting sense, more lastingly and transformatively in Goldberg’s view), Fluid Authority suggests that the participatory process uses works of arts as its medium to invite cultural participation. This participatory engagement blurs the distinct identities of artist and audience while it fashions reproducible examples that may in turn serve as additional invitations to participate. Diverging from a purely progressive, developmental or causal cultural paradigm, this participatory model is cyclical and repetitive, underscoring that examples of past creative practice are retrievable and may be re-configured for circumstances that are drastically different than those that led to their initial instantiation.

As the postmodern era’s rampant exploitation of quotation and appropriation demonstrated, works of art are retrievable and may serve as accessible tools employed for

purposes vastly different from their original instantiation. Chapters Three and Four illustrated this process as they examined how past works of art have been recuperated as a means of preservation (André Lepecki's *Re-doing* of Kaprow's *18 Happenings* and Marina Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces*) or to access a specific critical lens, as illustrated by David Khang's *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)*. Moreover, those examples featured artists accessing some of the most famous works of the canonical avant-garde and re-presenting those works in a manner that both directly acknowledged the earlier work and maintained its recognizable attributes. By contrast, Chapter 5 illustrated that previously existing creative examples may be recuperated as the medium for new works and serve as the creative opportunity that invites the audience's creative engagement. Additionally, within this process artists may reconfigure their own practices or revisit the example of other artists to develop projects that introduce audiences to creativity and make the role of "artist" accessible to participants. Both *The Patch Project* and *Imaginary Ordinary* showed that the term "artist" does not describe a stable identity but one that is enacted. Offering concise structures, concrete goals and refurbished creative precedents, Fluid Authority seems a bricolage comprised of derivative cultural precedents; its second-hand gestures may also lead one to believe that the practice lacks innovative qualities and fails to push the boundaries of what we might recognize as art. Such impressions are inescapable, but Fluid Authority is a perspective that acknowledges the utility persisting within past creative engagement and attempts to make that potential accessible to its audience. As it does so, Fluid Authority surmises that the boundaries of art are penetrable and that the role of "artist" is not a specialist privilege.

There are of course many ways to define an identity such as “artist,” but it is important to distinguish between its uses in official/bureaucratic culture and in the common vernacular. While it is understandable that an institutional agency such as the Canada Council for the Arts may set criteria to establish such an identity as a prerequisite for access to public funding, in the wider cultural field the term “artist” is mercurial and unpredictably invoked. At one extreme, specialized skills and interests as broad as those demonstrated by the proprietors of the portraiture kiosks in shopping malls and public festivals, the acrylic nail-painters of the “esthetic” world, and Subway’s sandwich-makers all have laid claim to the title of “artist.” At the other, the term is often applied to those that may resist such identifications (street, graffiti, Outsider practitioners) or those whose creative gestures might seem analogous to provocative actions already recognized as “art” (previously Madonna, currently Lady Gaga). Whatever the circumstances, there remains a tacit assumption of value and prestige in the identity, and while the specialist definition is the one that often associated with the idea of an “artist,” part of the allure of exploring a form such as Fluid Authority is that on some level it seems to problematize the specialist domination of the identity and demonstrate that it might be as available as the alternative and vernacular models suggest.

To understand the limitations and applicability of Fluid Authority, the present chapter recounts my own explorations of this concept in and through creative practice. Following the lead of Kaprow, Fluxus, TRUCK Gallery’s *The Patch Project*, and *Imaginary Ordinary*, I formulated a range of techniques for inviting audience engagement and recuperating creative exemplars. By introducing participants to the techniques of portmanteau word-coinage, by demonstrating how to manually “copy”

canonical cultural gestures and setting the example of community-based “micro-intervention,” I hoped to determine through my explorations how audiences perceive the opportunity for engagement and illustrate creative authorship. These projects were publicly presented and introduced into the cultural field with the hope that they, in their turn, might serve as creative prompts that others might adapt and re-apply in some indeterminate future. Ironically, this process would take advantage of the cultural field and its evaluative apparatus, a system that I vigorously critiqued throughout the thesis’ early chapters. While it might have been advisable to consider alternative presentation contexts that circumvented the larger cultural field, I am not at all certain that the field is escapable. Additionally, as a long-time artist I had been complicit with the field’s validating structures and although I would likely benefit from introducing the works through established professional channels, I also felt a responsibility to demonstrate that the cultural field might benefit from a more participatory audience.

Even though I questioned the field’s operation I did not aspire to launch a full-out avant-garde assault and undermine the field as a whole. Instead, I hoped to renovate the cultural field’s configuration and draw attention to an overlooked creative perspective that seemed capable of revitalizing the field’s established precedents while expanding the number of its participants. I hoped that the example of Fluid Authority might begin to make the case that participatory audiences could contribute to the field’s repertoire of possibilities and illustrate the need for the field’s current valuation system to be recalibrated. While I had no illusions about the efficacy of my work and understood its limited short-term impact, I knew that for it to ever approach the long-term effects that I had in mind, it had to establish some traction within the cultural field. Since I envisioned

that Fluid Authority's on-going viability depended upon its examples being accessible and retrievable resources, it was necessary to locate my demonstrations of the practice within the cultural field so that subsequently they might be available to the field's participants.

Of course, I was very happy that the work was supported by professional venues and was to some extent validated through this attention, but it was also a very harrowing experience to depend upon such institutions for the dissemination of the work. I have yet to achieve a level of esteem whereby I am simply invited by a venue to present my latest work—the projects that explored the potential of Fluid Authority were subjected to the peer-reviewed application system that is standard in many of Canada's artist-run centres. Thus, I could never guarantee that the work would be publicly presented in a manner that would be professionally recognized and after receiving a number of rejection letters I wondered if such responses discredited the validity of my ideas. I even considered organizing my own presentations of the work, but I thought that such a decision might be analogous to resorting to self-publishing as an alternative to the frustrations of the academic peer-review system. As the thesis was also a scholarly document, introducing its subjects into the cultural field through professional venues seemed the best way to demonstrate that my creative research was being pursued with a rigour analogous to scholarly standards. Despite this desire to meet this standard of professionalism, the relationship between my activities and research was somewhat precarious. While I was thankful that I was able to attract audiences that were willing to engage with the projects to become participants, I was very disinclined to think of these participants as potential “data” that I could exploit to prove my point. While my research may have been

weakened by my reluctance to pursue the question of whether the participants perceived themselves as artists through Fluid Authority's creative experiences, I had wished to set a respectful example that did not depend upon the audience's self-perception but only whether or not they were able to engage with the participatory models that I had devised.

The practices of *Coinagitation*, *Suffragency*, and *Perplexecution* were my attempts to "lead by example" and demonstrate how creativity might be practiced, made accessible and disseminated. While their audiences were small and their effects local, they were undertaken with the sincere desire to investigate different ways of practicing creativity and in the hope that whatever audiences that they might have reached benefited from the chance to practice creativity and experience authorship. While each of these notions reveals something of the parameters and contours of Fluid Authority, none of these individual creative methods is co-extensive with the entirety of the practice as I conceive it. The proliferation of examples suggests the potentiality of the idea and how it might be applied, but the examples that I offer here are only a small sampling of what might be possible in a movement towards an idea such as Fluid Authority.

Coinagitation

The term *Coinagitation*, like the practices I will refer to as *Suffragency* and *Perplexecution*, is a portmanteau coinage. Portmanteaux blend the alphabetic content and/or sounds of two or more familiar words to generate new linguistic terms loaded with connotative implications. The invention of the practice is usually credited to Lewis Carroll (Stewart 163) and it is the source of the idiosyncratic language found in the poem "Jabberwocky" in *Through the Looking Glass*. To illustrate how these words function

Carroll had Humpty Dumpty explain to Alice: “Well, ‘slithy’ means ‘lithe and slimy.’ ‘Lithe’ is the same as ‘active.’ You see it’s like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word” (Carroll 126-7). The portmanteau also figures extensively in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. The ability of portmanteau word-coinage to overturn literary conventions and habitual linguistic interpretations has long intrigued me, and I have always admired how such word-coinages can transform the banal and familiar into the *banalchemical* and *familiarresting*. The technique’s ability to revisit existing language and creatively remodel it made portmanteau coinage an ideal method for naming my varied creative recuperations. Combining the ideas of “coinage” and “agitation,” I imagined the practice of *Coinagitation* as a method for renovating tired terminology, shopworn clichés and stock responses, and for showing that language is a malleable medium that can be adapted to suit the needs of the user.

Figure 6.1: Promotional Image for *CANCELdomly CALGARious*. Photo: RICHard SMOLinski.



Coinagitation has twice been presented as a participatory performance and once I presented a paper describing the idea at a scholarly conference.⁹⁸ The performance was initially conceived as a workshop and was proposed to TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary as a project to be presented through the CAMPER venue discussed in Chapter Five. While TRUCK's programming committee ultimately declined to include my project as part of the CAMPER programming, TRUCK's Director Renato Vitic and Erin Belanger, TRUCK's then Programming Coordinator, contacted me to explore an alternative context for presenting the project. After discussing the logistics we agreed that *Coinagitation* would be presented as part of the gallery's *Soap Box Series*, a forum that presents lectures, readings, panel discussions and workshops to stimulate art discourse and promote cultural debate. My workshop, re-titled *CANCELdomy CALGARious*, was publicized as a participatory performance. The event was prefaced by an exegetic lecture and concluded with a post-performance discussion. The workshop was designed to introduce its audience to the portmanteau's historical and creative application, and facilitate the technique's exploration through the collective writing of a narrative. My aim was to make "coinage" accessible for the audience so that post-workshop they might recognize contexts where the application of the technique might yield a coinage that succinctly articulated a number of concurrent ideas implicit within a complex situation. To make this point the pre-performance lecture was decidedly "agitational." Throughout my introduction I stressed that portmanteau word-coinage was not some esoteric and obsolete experimental writing technique but a practice that the audience were

⁹⁸ The paper was delivered 13 June 2010 at PSi #16: *Performing Publics*. My offer to lead the "participatory performance workshop," *Coinagitation: Torontorrid Testimodalities* as one of the conference's "shift" offerings, was declined.

unconsciously surrounded by and under the influence of. Pointing towards the insinuating catch-phraseology of mass-media advertising, I suggested how these inescapable bits of commoditized language were employed to create desire and sway judgment. Participating in the workshop might serve a resistive function, I suggested, illustrating how word-coinage might subvert mass-media uses of the technique. Since Grant Kester questioned the orthopedic tendencies of the avant-garde, I was weary of treating the audience as if they were flawed and in need of remedial cultural training. With my earlier visual art projects, I had never thought that my satirically motivated work was launched against my imagined audience's foibles or structured to critique their individual actions; instead I often felt that I was sharing a "joke" with the audience and that they were capable of "getting it" and sharing in the (hopefully) humorous critique of a problem or behaviour that they too might have recognized. As well, it is difficult to imagine publicly presenting *Coinagitation* if I had thought that the audience was lacking in any way. The invitation to participate was offered under the assumption that the audience was capable of the sort of subversion that I had planned. Rather than trying to rectify some lack, the performance offered its participants a beneficial experience, something in addition to each individual's pre-existing capabilities and perspectives. The performance merely reconnoitered a cognitive terrain with which the audience was already familiar and offered a new way of perceiving and responding to this familiarity.

Of my three attempts at creatively exploring Fluid Authority, *Coinagitation* was developed most directly with my research question in mind. Indeed, the problem of "how do artists invite audiences to participate in works of art?" was at the centre of my concerns as I began to imagine the work's structure and plan how I would invite the

audience to become participants. To locate an appropriate model I revisited the examples set by Allan Kaprow. As described in Chapter Two subsequent to establishing the Happenings in the New York Scene, Kaprow was deluged with opportunities to present his work across the United States and overseas. Unlike *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* where Kaprow had the opportunity to rehearse and refine the performance, these invited opportunities afforded little opportunity to properly prepare his audience of participants and yielded chaotic results. Developing mechanisms to attract prospective participants and efficiently introduce them to their performative responsibilities was one of the most important challenges of Kaprow's early career. Instead of hastily introducing the audience/participants to the Happening directly before a performance, such as with *Out*, Kaprow devised a two-stage strategy to attract the attention and secure the participatory engagement of his audiences. The first phase used posters that diagrammed and provided evocative details of the tasks and experiences that the participant might share if they accepted Kaprow's invitation. Directly before the performance was scheduled to begin, the participants were introduced to the nuances of the performance's metaphoric and theoretic concerns and the specific performance responsibilities were mapped-out.

The overall event of *CANCELdomly CALGARious* possessed a similar structure. Information about the project's participatory aspects was disseminated pre-performance through physical invitations and posters, and digitally through e-vites and TRUCK's website. When the audience was assembled, I elaborated upon the skeletal information that had led them to attend the proposed undertaking. Like Kaprow I took the opportunity to delve into the project's meanings and possible resonances, and explained how the audience might become a vital part of the work. While Kaprow's methods were used to

engage the “committed” and yield performances “for participants only,” I informed the audience that there were many ways to participate: as physically engaged enactors, as spectators that might offer words of advice and encouragement to those scripting the collective narrative or as observers that could witness the development of the narrative in its entirety. The invitation to participate, then, was addressed directly to the audience. The techniques that served as the basis for the performance were illustrated and the responsibilities that the audience was to fulfill were clearly explained. This direct address informed the audience of how they might become part of this creative process and reminded them that they had the option to decide for themselves their degree of engagement.

While the form of the performance was informed by Kaprow’s example, the content of the project recuperated portmanteau word-coinage and reconfigured the practice as a resistive strategy. While Lewis Carroll’s use of portmanteaux is intriguing and illustrates the incredible malleability of language, its example did not immediately inspire widespread embrace of the technique. While the portmanteau might have been marginalized as an insular literary diversion, James Joyce’s use of the technique in *Finnegans Wake* assured its canonization by the literary avant-garde. Joyce accessed the technique along with an array of other literary adaptations and pastichifications to yield what on first glance appears to be an invented tongue. This seemingly impenetrable language, however, possesses a paradoxical familiarity that invites the reader’s interpretive investigation. Extricating the sensible from the myriad associative meanings integrated within each individual word proves a spiraling challenge that persistently resists interpretive closure and definite resolution. An illustration of this difficulty was

identified by Umberto Eco in *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce*. Examining the construction, “Jungfraud’s Messonage book,” Eco suggested that the reader may detect “Jung + Freud + young + fraud + Jungfrau + message + songe + mensonge” (65-66). Through recognition of the term’s possible components, a reader decrypts Joyce’s compressed and connotatively saturated terminology, yet they cannot help but become aware of the limitations of their engagement. Although the reader might choose an avenue of interpretation, they can never exhaust the interpretive possibilities of the portmanteaux, a dilemma noted by Eco: “Obviously, the reader cannot pursue all of these references in the course of a single reading. One is compelled to choose among possible interpretive paths and to disambiguate various levels of sense....to find an order and, at the same time, to realize there are many possible orders; a given choice does not eliminate the alternatives” (66). While Joyce’s use of the technique is fascinating, Umberto Eco called *Finnegans Wake* the “most terrifying document of formal instability and semantic ambiguity that we possess” (61).

Although I assumed that the audience attending *CANCELdomy CALGARious* would be unconsciously familiar with portmanteau word-coinage, I did not think this unwitting awareness would be via either Carroll’s or Joyce’s examples. Instead, a more likely candidate was Koodo Mobile. In the summer of 2009, the discount cellular telephone company entered Calgary’s crowded mobile telephone market⁹⁹ and as part of its early advertising campaign, Koodo exploited the portmanteau to promote its *Koodolutionary* products and services. Throughout this series of advertisements, Koodo

⁹⁹ In Calgary’s over-saturated market, new lines were launched at a furious pace. Hardly had I harped upon and harangued Koodo in my performance when that company’s thunder was stolen by Wind Mobile. Wind’s brief moment of newness was soon eclipsed by the launch of Solo Mobile.

promised to save their customers from *big billification* by providing a *fectomy* that Koodo claimed would result in *billmazing* savings. The advertising campaign featured a slew of annoying radio spots and ad placards upon Calgary’s public transit that paired the linguistic sloganeering with distorted caricatures that suggested that Koodo’s prime customers were leering and drooling fools in the midst of a three-day “meth” bender. I

Figure 6.2: Introducing the audience to portmanteau word-coinage. 14 October 2009. Photo-still from video document by Lisa Borin.



am not in a position to judge the relative veracity of Koodo’s economic claims, but this sudden explosion of portmanteaux was fortuitous because it provided familiar and readily accessible examples of portmanteaux ripe for critique. During the Kaprow-inspired, pre-performance prologue, I introduced the technique via the Koodo example and contrasted its contemporary usage with the historical precedents of Carroll and Joyce. To illustrate the technique’s challenges, I discussed the Eco material referenced above and ratcheted up the evening’s sense of challenge by explaining that the participatory performance

would not only feature an active investigation of portmanteau word-coinage but the use of this technique to devise a collective narrative.

Rather than manually inscribing the collective narrative upon a page, typing it upon a PC or tape-recording it in some way, the performance used magnetized alphabetic characters to make the composition of the narrative a palpably physical undertaking. Because the walls of TRUCK's foyer resource centre had been pre-treated with metallic paint, the magnetic letters could easily adhere to the space's vertical surfaces. As the participants devised their narrative fragments the performance space became a tableau strewn with their collective composition. The colourful magnetic characters were chosen in part because of their familiarity; I imagined that many of the participants would have seen or used them on a childhood chalkboard or upon a refrigerator door—as such I hoped they would be a non-intimidating medium. Additionally, such humble, everyday materials were chosen to illustrate that even the simplest of tools might be employed for creative exploration. In addition to familiarity and possessing a tactile and visual appeal, the magnetic alphabetic characters were also chosen because they slow down the composition process. Rather than the immediacy of writing or typing, it takes time to manually grasp a succession of letters, a delay that allows for critical appraisal and the mental consideration of alternatives. This critical reconsideration was also important when we attempted to weave together the various narrative strands, the magnets could be easily moved and replaced, allowing easy revision of the collected text.

After explaining and illustrating the compositional process, and explaining the various options for audience participation in the performance—from active, hands-on engagement to consultancy and observation—I asked for a show of hands to determine

how many participants wished to engage physically with the creative possibility of the collective text. Despite how unpromising or unlikely the undertaking may have sounded some 40 participants took part in the performance. I tried to lead by example and worked alongside the participants to compose, revise and resolve our collective work. The biggest challenge was sentence structure and trying to blend together the many threads to produce a narrative that at least echoed the sensible. After about 60 minutes of concerted effort the crowd's enthusiasm abated and the performance concluded with my attempt to read the collective narrative. In actuality the participants were much better at verbalizing the texts they had fashioned and the majority of this part of the performance featured the audience's generous efforts to correct my poor oral performance of our text.¹⁰⁰ The original post-performance plan was to exhibit the performance results for a few days and have the remaining letters available as an open invitation for subsequent visitors to continue the process. This plan proved very successful and several viewers participated, revising and amending the work initiated through the performance. TRUCK extended this interactive exhibition period through an additional week. The way the work was presented and the directness of its invitational structure combined to make participation open to the audience. As an example of Fluid Authority, *CANCELdomly CALGARious* made available the practices of portmanteau word-coinage and collective narrative composition. These forms allowed a great degree of creative leeway to the participants—

¹⁰⁰ The subsequent *Coinagitation* performance, *Wordinary Imagenuity* (November 12, 2010), climaxed with a ragged chorus featuring the participants verbalizing the collaborative “score.” One of the participants was Australian visual artist Krishnamurti Suparka, who read his contribution to the collective narrative in an exaggerated Spanish accent to capture the strange cadences of his reconfigured language. This performance took place at The 25th Annual Interdisciplinary Conference in the Humanities: Word/Image/Culture at the University of West Georgia (Carrollton, GA, USA).

there was no set theme or overarching story that it was our aim to tell, only the opportunity to take part in the act of storytelling. Ultimately the performance illustrated the audience's latent creative potential; likewise it demonstrated how authorship is an accessible function and an identity that is not only secured through the demonstration of skill, but also through the embrace of opportunity.

Suffragency

While the practice of *Coinagitation* explored through *CANCELdomly CALGARious* proved an effective method for inviting participation and reanimating previously established creative examples, by no means did I feel that I could dust off my hands, straighten my chapeau and assume that I knew all that I was interested in knowing about Fluid Authority. Utilizing portmanteau word-coinage and devising collective texts demonstrated the audience's creative capacity, but these examples of retrievable art practice were somewhat limited. While I had gained some insight into how to invite participation, it seemed necessary to expand the repertoire of creative examples available to the audience. To explore this possibility, I focused upon the issue of recuperative art and how it might serve as the media for new works. Perhaps it was the thought-provoking example of *M. Butterfly (After Shigeo Kubota)*, but I initially toyed with the idea of resuscitating a few performance art works from the canonical avant-garde and attempting the sort of "citational" blending that David Khang had explored. Unfortunately, I never found the right combination of examples to attempt that sort of creative reconstitution.

My investigation of Allan Kaprow and his marginal profile next came to mind as a possible resource and it seemed appropriate to acknowledge his influence by employing

his work as an example of recuperative art. The work that I originally envisioned, *24-Hour Kaprow*, was to be a performance video of Kaprow's collected works that would be re-presented as a 24-hour-long video. The project was appealing on two fronts. Firstly, it would underscore Kaprow's dedication to the ephemeral practice of performance and illustrate how many of his ideas and activities have become standard gestures within the performance art repertoire. Secondly, the format would point towards Douglas Gordon's "found" film, *24 Hour Psycho*, a work that reconfigured Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller *Psycho* to a twenty-four hour length. Unlike the glacial pace of Gordon's film, I imagined that *24-Hour Kaprow* would unfurl at an accelerated clip and that the film would seem like a frenzied highbrow Keystone Kops feature. *24-Hour Kaprow* also would have been another front on which to engage Nicolas Bourriaud, whom I was beginning to see as my nemesis. Gordon's film had figured largely in Bourriaud's *Postproduction*, a theoretical text that attempted to articulate how contemporary artists re-use and re-configure past creative works. My abandoned *film* would have extensively recuperated and re-performed Kaprow's oeuvre but the anticipated project, like many of the works in Bourriaud's earlier *Relational Aesthetics*, in no way would have accounted for the possibility of participation or the audience as a potentially creative participant.

Instead of helping to map Fluid Authority, *24-Hour Kaprow* seemed destined to be a recuperative parody such as *Baldessari Sings LeWitt* or Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley's notorious *Fresh Acconci*, where Vito Acconci's confrontational body art gestures were reconstituted as the basis for a soft-core porn film. Though the idea of *24-Hour Kaprow* was intriguing, I was apprehensive about the project's parodic quality. While I have always thought comedy, parody and satire to be important and sensible

responses to the world, I have often wondered if my interest in these methods has not hindered my career. Despite Linda Hutcheon's efforts to clearly delineate parody as "imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony cuts both ways" (37) and as a "form of inter-art discourse" (2), contemporary art's tolerance for parody runs the limited gamut between Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami. Because some of my work has aspired to function as a sort of cognitive slapstick, I have often felt that my sincerity has been doubted and my seriousness questioned. While the idea of the Kaprow film had its appeal, I had little faith that I would find a venue that would support the project, so rather than repeating the frustration of producing a work and having no place to disseminate it, I decided to re-think this exploration of recuperation. When I reconsidered the example of Khang's citational practice, I was reminded that critical distance could be a bit more sophisticated than the smirking, self-congratulatory parody of Koons. Accessing avant-garde composition, gender performativity and Otherness, Khang's practice demonstrated that identity could be defined in juxtaposition with history and through creative engagement. While Khang focused upon a few very salient instances to investigate the construction of identity, I was thinking about identity more broadly conceived, a sense of identity that intimated authority and that required acknowledgement and acquiescence.

At the risk of indulging in a bit of parody, to imagine the scenario I was thinking about, picture a number of very dark clouds coalescing overhead until the brooding sky rumbles with thunder. Name this convergence "the canon" and under this amassment of precedents, pinnacles and masterpieces imagine a contemporary "artist" striking what is known in the vernacular as "the tortured artist pose." In such a position, the artist might question the value of adding to the plethora of art objects that already dominate the

cultural atmosphere and feel that they were “suffering under the weight” of the canonical precedents overhead. When an artist speaks of “the canon,” they are really addressing the “Western” canon, and even though in actuality there are several, the Western canon is the dominant variety and it has been said to regulate “the entire system of cultural appraisal” (Bryzski 1). The notion of cultural appraisal is important because, as art historian Robert Jensen points out, “Nothing cultural in the world possesses intrinsic value. Values must always be collectively conferred” (29). The conveying of value is especially problematic in the case of the Western canon because it represents its own values as superior to other cultural traditions and its precedents as more advanced than achievements under other aesthetic regimes. My own relationship to this state of affairs is conflicted—as a white, North American heterosexual male of European heritage, I am squarely within the dominant Western Cultural tradition; however, the culture I am identified by tends to exclude and devalue identities not included in this privileged list.

To understand how this practice of privileging and exclusion contributed to the shape of the (Western) canon, I thought it was important to understand what it contained and what sorts of cultural expression were not a part of the canonical account. Since Jensen’s research method used quantitative methodology to investigate this “collective conferring” of value through a prime physical repository of art history’s canon—its post-secondary textbooks—I thought what better way to perform “suffering” than to confront one of these weighty bundles of judgment and validation. I soon gravitated to *The Oxford History of Western Art*, an imposing object edited by Martin Kemp and featuring contributions by over fifty writers. The volume emphasizes the predominance of the Western perspective and serves an *indoctrinary* role in the study of art, establishing the

criteria by which a vast array of images and objects are validated as the successive pinnacles of human achievement. Commencing with figure 1, the former Parthenon but still the “Elgin” Marbles, and culminating 735 illustrations later with the Guggenheim Bilbao, the book projects the appearance of being co-extensive with the canon. The book’s date of publication, 2000, hints, however, at the precariousness of this particular canon. As one millennium was drawing to a close and another emerging, it might have seemed like a good point to take stock and assess the achievements of the West’s cultural production. Yet this change of millennia is itself an entirely Westcentric construct that the rest of the world has long had to deal with and taking stock is often an action that precedes divestment and the settling of accounts. As the Global Art Market allows a widening variety of perspectives and values to take part in cultural discourse, the West loses its sense of cultural primacy; the Western canon, as embodied in the Oxford tome, appears to have definitely passed its apex and entered into terminal decline.

Settling on this particular book helped the practice of *Suffragency* to come into focus. Combining the linguistic clues of “sufferance,” “suffering,” “suffrage,” and “agency,” the term hints at the ambivalent right and responsibility to be a cultural participant. The first pair of twinned terms hint at an unpleasant circumstance that one is subjected to and that is patiently endured and tolerated—like the canonical cloud analogy sketched out above. The second pair of words point towards the idea of democratic participation and the ability to act within a social system; together, these words suggest the capability to affect the world that one is a part of and contribute to how it functions. Of course the idea of universal “suffrage” that is implied in this second pair was slow to take root and was once an exclusive privilege only accessible to a single gender and a

specific class. As such, it was not immediately recognized as an “intrinsic” or inalienable right, but one that was secured through long-term struggle and prolonged social engagement. Once coined, the term *Suffragency* intimated the idea of an artistic right and responsibility to participate in culture, act on or through historical examples, and pursue creative gestures that might democratize the canons of culture by making past works available for widespread usage. However, the old cliché regarding suffering (and insufferable) artists was not far from my mind and probably in retrospect I should have been more leery of this loaded term and have anticipated some of the practice’s potential problems.

Like *Coinagitation*, the practice of *Suffragency* demanded that the creative gesture be repeatable, but I also hoped to develop a work that could be summarized into a single sentence. Additionally, the work should be performable so that it might be observed and thus serve as a potential trigger for the audience’s engagement. Finally, the work should be structured in such a way that a portion of it would serve to elucidate the whole. The first *Suffragency* project that I developed, *Disambiguating*, proposed to “draw *The Oxford History of Western Art* from memory.” The idea of articulating this undertaking in nine words is an obvious echo of the spare and evocative Event Scores developed by Fluxus artists Yoko Ono, George Brecht and Dick Higgins and the sort of accessible directives that Allan Kaprow employed in *Self-Service*. Offering only the barest information Event Scores hover ambiguously at the edge of art: are they meant to be performed and be an embodied experience or are they intended to be cognitive properties, a sort of art that exists most provocatively in perpetual potentiality? I hoped that the invitation to “draw *The Oxford History of Western Art* from memory” possessed

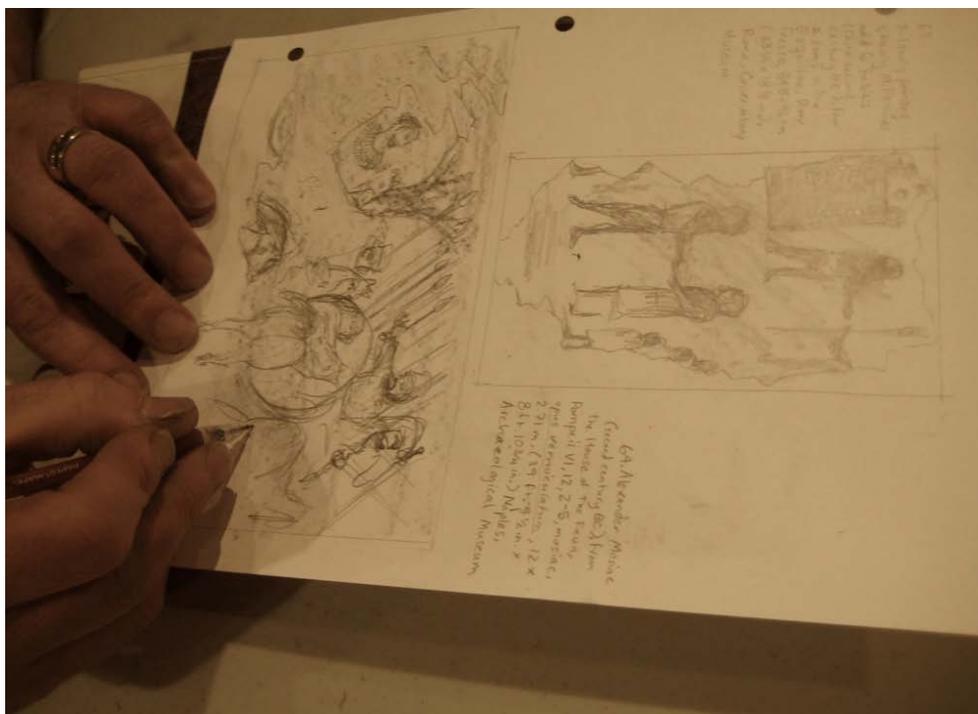
this sort of tension and might catch the speculative attention of even those that only heard of my undertaking. The “score,” though, had to possess sufficient information so that it was cognitively accessible and at the very least seemed possible to complete; yet, the work should seem like an open invitation that allowed the potential participant room for interpretation and adaptation.

As with *Coinagitation*, *Disambiguating* was proposed to a number of juried exhibition venues and presentation organizations and despite a flurry of rejection letters and much silence, the project was eventually presented at the Ledge Gallery at Calgary’s Epcor Centre for the Performing Arts. On the building’s top floor and overlooking the Centre’s courtyard, the Ledge is a former commercial site with a very airy and accessible design featuring glass-walls and an open ceiling. The space opens onto Calgary’s +15 indoor pedestrian corridor and was a great venue for *Disambiguating*. During the performance the space offered a transient crowd that unwittingly came across the work, but it was also sufficiently secluded that I was not constantly distracted while I laboured upon the task that I had set for myself. The space contained two tables, one that displayed the work in progress, and one that served as my workspace and the place where I received visitors. Two chairs faced each other along this table’s two long sides. On one side of this table were my meager drawing supplies—the sheets of paper that featured the pre-traced frames corresponding to the size and configuration of each image as it appeared in the source text, my graphite pencils, sharpeners and erasers. Across the table from where I sat, were additional drawing supplies for any guests that might wish to participate in the performance, including a stack of blank pages that invited the viewer’s

use. Between the two stacks was a digital timer to ensure my adherence to my scheduled length of engagement with each canonized work.

The work was originally designed to last exactly two workweeks, and allowed a 5-minute and 18-second interval for each drawing (a length of time determined by dividing the 80 hours of two workweeks by 735 images). As The Ledge offered a longer exhibition period, I had the opportunity to restructure the undertaking and decided upon a

Figure 6.3: Recollecting the “Alexander Mosaic.” Photo: Linda Carreiro.



10-minute timeframe that offered the possibility of a reasonable rendition of the remembered image while frustrating the desire for refinement and perfect recollection.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ I considered various lengths until I stumbled upon Rodney Graham’s *Vexation Island*, a work that premiered at the 1997 Venice Biennale. The film’s length (8 minutes) was based on the average length of time that a Biennale viewer spends observing an artwork. Projected as a loop, the work could be viewed as continually unfolding (*Vexation Island*, ubuweb). The drawing length, then, was influenced by a desire to go slightly beyond the comfortable or accustomed length of a viewer’s engagement.

To ensure a fidelity to the 10-minute time limit, the digital timer chimed once at the drawing's five-minute mark and repeatedly when the time was complete. The performance began March 4, 2010 and continued until April 30, 2010.¹⁰² My original schedule anticipated that the overall performance would occur over 124 hours, but as I increasingly needed breaks from my efforts, the number of overall drawing hours ultimately ended up being 159. In contrast to the weighty subject of the canon and the overwhelming challenge implicit in remembering the visual contents of *The Oxford History of Western Art*, the performance itself was somewhat modest in execution. Each of the drawings was completed using only graphite pencil. While I was often frustrated by my performance throughout the allotted 10 minutes, I never once circumvented this rule and would dutifully end when the chime began. The performance quickly revealed that the quality of the recalled drawings was beside the point, and although many of the images ended up being shockingly rudimentary it was not always the remembering that was the problem, but usually my adherence to the arbitrary choice of a 10 minute time limit. This adherence, though, begs the question of how long might have been adequate? Should I have followed a more intuitive approach and allowed the length to reflect the depth of my memory? Perhaps I remembered Sol LeWitt's stipulation about Conceptual Art that "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work" (80) and realized that the specific amount of time was not important in comparison to the idea of recalling a series of diverse images and recuperatively drawing each over a standardized time

¹⁰² Coincidentally, *Disambiguating*'s timeframe roughly overlapped Marina Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* (March 14–May 31, 2010). In the 736 hour 30 minute performance Abramović sat silent and still at a table and gallery visitors were invited to participate in the piece by sitting across from her and sharing an extended glance. The one-to-one intimacy of both our projects is an interesting similarity.

frame. As with Conceptual Art, in *Disambiguating* “all the planning and decisions [were] made beforehand and the execution [was] a perfunctory affair” (LeWitt 80).

While “perfunctory” makes the process seem as if it might have been a walk in the park, the concept’s unwavering timeframe was a great leveler and equalizer—it forced a drastic simplification of the complex and allowed the subtle to be incredibly nuanced. Rather than being able to achieve the utmost accuracy, I soon learned what was possible in the little time that I had. The timeframe inspired an intense focus but its arbitrariness rendered the drawing’s aesthetic shortcomings beside the point. While the project was designed to make creativity accessible, I am not sure that I would call *Disambiguating* “creative”; instead, the live performance seemed the fulfillment of a contractual obligation.¹⁰³ Performing my duties for some fifteen to twenty hours a week, I worked methodically through the textbook: mostly I worked without being noticed, but sometimes a visitor would stop by to observe my efforts or track my progress. As the performance exceeded the audience’s capacity to witness it in its entirety, a brief period of viewing stood in for the work as a whole. Even as I worked, I interacted with the audience, explaining as best that I could the purpose of my labour and inviting the willing to draw along with me.

While this direct address echoed the invitational strategy of *CANCELdomy* *CALGARious*, it did not trigger the widespread embrace of the creative opportunity that was part of the portmanteau-based project. The most usual response was a bashful decline

¹⁰³ Ironically, while engaged in this process I was also part of a development dispute in my neighbourhood. In a milieu where official culture and public institutions repeatedly failed to live up to their obligations, complete due diligence or communicate effectively, my project’s dogged labour was an unconscious rebuke to The City of Calgary’s ineffectual Planning and Development division. For more on this tragic episode see my introduction to the monograph, *Imaginary Ordinary: A Community Mapping-Project*.

accompanied by a divulgence of an inability to draw a straight line. The most enthusiastic participants were children and other artists. I did not specify what the participants should draw. One artist drew her favorite Group of Seven painting from memory, a few others drew me while I was drawing; one artist even drew what I was drawing *as* I was drawing it, each of her marks responding to each of my recuperative scrawls. The participants were also invited to display their finished drawings on the wall of my performance space: the artists all contributed to this, but many of the children decided they would rather keep their works.

Figure 6.4: Completing Image 735, “The Guggenheim Bilbao” and the performance, *Disambiguating* 30 April 2010. Photo: Linda Carreiro.



Disambiguating was the hardest thing I ever did. It was mentally draining work and I had grave misgivings about the work’s viability as an accessible example for subsequent users. While such apprehensions were my own fault, the situation was in no way helped by the lack of critical response that the project generated. Perhaps because of the project’s lengthy availability, the absence of a review or a blog-mention was especially disappointing and it seemed that under such circumstances the work would have difficulty reaching the imagined “distanced” audience that was not at the initial event. Part of the problem was, of course, in the design of this particular creative gesture. Even though I have conducted many classes with such unabashedly truth-in-advertising

Figure 6.5: The initial invitation to participate, Martin Kemp’s source text and the post-performance archive of my memory drawings. Photo: RICHARD SMOLINSKI



titles as “Drawing for the Completely Intimidated,” and “Drawing for the Frightened Beginner,” and intimately know the trepidations of committing to the drawn mark, I had

not anticipated that the invitation to “draw” might inhibit participation. While the project seemed to fulfill much of the criteria I had set for it (it could be described as concisely as an Event Score, a brief engagement suggested the breadth of the whole of the work, it was an executable and presumably repeatable gesture), I wondered how I could mitigate the work’s skill basis to make it more inviting for its participatory audience. Even as I suffered through *Disambiguating*, I began to draft further projects that, by mitigating the emphasis upon skill, might make *Suffragency* more inviting to participants. One of these as yet unexecuted works, *Facsimile*, focuses upon the facsimile edition of the manuscript of T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* (as edited and annotated by Ezra Pound) that would be produced (or more accurately reproduced) and disseminated using a facsimile machine. The work that seemed to best extend the idea of *Suffragency* and resolve the implied necessity of drawing skill, however, was *Trace* “*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*” As its title suggests, the gesture literally and ironically invited the participant to reproduce Walter Benjamin’s influential critique of the effect of reproductive technologies on an artwork’s “aura.” The suggested action was nicely concise and easy to comprehend; tracing paper and pencil are simple materials and it is easy to imagine the process of tracing each word as it appeared in the source text. As well, the work was not only one that could be completed but one whose completion was repeatable. Additionally, with tracing there is no inference of prerequisite skill— participation only requires time and commitment to the available experience. Here was a method of image-making that used a simple and accessible technology to respond to a historical precedent. *Trace* promised to launch the practice of tracing as a creative process and made available an example that is infinitely repeatable by subsequent

participants. The resulting images might be substantially the same, but the qualitative experience of creative engagement would vary from user to user.

Perplexecution

I will return to *Trace* below because in between the first and second instantiation of *Suffragency*, a third form of Fluid Authority, *Perplexecution*, was explored. While *Coinagitation* and *Suffragency* were mounted within professional art contexts, *Perplexecution* was developed as a public project that required no official sanction or institutional support. As a sort of “gentlemanly” graffiti, this non-destructive and non-permanent practice was designed to modestly and circumspectly intervene into public space. Unlike graffiti, which are located to demarcate claimed territory or assert an individual egoism, the *Perplexecutions* were designed to momentarily challenge assumed knowledge and habitual social practice. To echo Eco and his elucidation of Joyce, within the term “Perplexecution” one might detect: perplex + execution + elocution + lexical + accusation. The practice revisited portmanteau word-coinage and generated a series of terms that satirically responded to and critically commented upon specific locales in the social realm. Each term or phrase was produced as an edition of small magnetic signs; to make the work as accessible and repeatable as possible, the signs were designed using a very simple digital program (Microsoft WordArt) and printed on magnetic paper with an inkjet printer. The signs were hand-cut using household scissors. The signs’ magnetic quality allowed them to be surreptitiously inserted into the public realm on any metallic surface, such as dumpsters, benches, light standards and newspaper boxes. As part of the urban *mise en scène* the *Perplexecutions* might catch the attention of unsuspecting

viewers, momentarily interrupting their unconscious advance through space and provoking a moment of reflection, wonder, doubt or insight. In contrast to the other examples of Fluid Authority that unabashedly asserted their associations with existing art practices, *Perplexecution* operated on the community level and at some distance from recognizable cultural institutions. Informed by *Imaginary Ordinary*'s use of mapping to elide the art-informed practices at the centre of their community investigation, the *Perplexecutions* performed at the edge of what might be immediately recognizable as art and imagined that they fulfilled a "community improvement" function.

Probably because my mood was sour after my prolonged battle against irresponsible development within my neighbourhood, the first series of *Perplexecutions* tended to be rather caustic and accusatory. Reprising my enthusiastic bashing of the mobile telephone culture during *CANCELdomly CALGARious*, I developed one intervention specifically for a cellular telephone tower that had been recently erected a few blocks from where I live. *WINDignation* appropriated WIND Mobile's corporate logo, blended it with the term "indignation," and yielded a magnet that signified dismay at the large phallic-shaped intrusion into my community. Other works developed for specific sites, in retrospect, were likely too precisely addressed to distinct situations and were therefore too cryptic and obscure for most viewers to access and interpret. As my attempts at site-specificity were less satisfying than I had hoped, the next wave of *Perplexecutions* were more flexible. Featuring terms such as "extravagastly," "comMERCILESS SHAMbitions," and "DISterly bitAPPOINTED," I hoped to achieve an accumulative effect where the viewer might notice several of these terms dispersed throughout the community and over an extended time period. With such phrases the

intent and connotations were complex and suggestive; likewise their apparent meaning was affected by its contextual location. While the implicit critique of a term like “extravagantly” is obvious, the nuance of the commentary differs whether it is adhered to a “luxury” condominium’s dumpster or the bumper of a Hummer.

Figure 6.6: *DISterly BitAPPOINTED* in situ, Calgary, Alberta. August 2010.
Photo: RICHard SMOLinski



As I was drafting the fifth chapter of my thesis while executing these interventions, I began to wonder whether I was confirming Grant Kester’s idea of “orthopedic” art and producing work directed at a flawed audience in need of cognitive recalibration, but I still hoped that what I was attempting was not a curative, but a *benefit*. I operated under the assumptions that the audience did not suffer from any significant lack and that they were capable of appreciating my modest attempts at social critique. Additionally, this capability meant that audience members were prepared to engage as

participants in the work and had the wherewithal to adapt and reconfigure the work as necessary. Yet, I was starting to think of these *Perplexecutions* as “community improvements” and I wondered how this squared with my larger project. The next wave of *Perplexecutions* was developed as a critique of the profusion of mass-media advertising littering public space. As I wandered my neighbourhood on foot, I would often be irritated and dismayed by the proliferation of advertisements plastered upon transit benches, light stands and newspaper boxes—constant reiterations of some corporate insignia designed to make me desire cheaper cell-phone rates, a third-rate condo or a double cheeseburger. To counteract this tendency I thought my community might benefit from interventions into our collective space that advertised *nothing* and created no *desire*. This series, *Your Moment of Bliss*, included essentially positive signs (or more figuratively, + signs) and focused upon words with negative connotations, such as disappointment and mistaken, that were pre-fixed with “dis” and “mis.” These terms were reconfigured by changing the prefix to ‘bliss,’ a process that yielded such evocative words as “blissorientation,” “blissappointment,” and “blisstaken.” Typeset in bright colours these small signs were distributed throughout my extended community and hopefully improved many unsuspecting viewers’ experience of our communal, public domain.

Unlike the *Coinagitation* and *Suffragency*, creative examples that both required extensive preparation, exhaustive effort and space dedicated to their presentation, *Perplexecution* was an incredibly flexible and immediate working method. With conventional exhibitions and entrenched creative practices the work is often produced long before its public display or publication. While this gap might enhance the critical

distance that allows an artist to better assess the relative strengths and limitations of her or his own work, it might also mean that the relationship between the creative process and a work of art's effects becomes tenuous and disassociated. With *Perplexecution* the process of disseminating the work immediately followed its production. Indeed, in a single day, a *Bliss* term could be coined, digitally designed as a sign, inkjet printed and hand-cut. In that same day I could distribute its many instantiations throughout my community on my evening walk. In many ways, my search for metal surfaces appropriate for my signs altered my normal movement through my neighbourhood and acted as a

Figure 6.7: *Blissappearance* in situ, Calgary, Alberta. September 2010. Photo: RICHARD SMOLINSKI



unintended recuperation of the Situationist's *dérive*. The simplicity of this process was especially appealing because it seemed to be potentially accessible and repeatable, but, in reality, one could make it even easier by dispensing with the technology and echo the *Perplexecution* process by embracing manual inscription. A participant could revise the technique by using indelible felt-tip markers to hand-inscribe a message upon magnetic paper. While the *Your Moment of Bliss* signs were simple rectangles that framed the coloured text, a participant could easily give the work more visual impact by cutting away the negative space around the text or by devising more complex shapes that framed the sign's textual component.

I have yet to notice whether or not anyone ever followed my example and took up the opportunity to engage in this form of public critique. Perhaps if some one-time viewer, now participant, fashioned his or her own *Perplexecutions*, they suffered the same fate as my efforts. The *Bliss* signs had a very short lifespan. I would canvas an area and within a few days all of the magnets would be gone. Perhaps some overzealous citizen thought them unsightly and cleared them from view and disposed of them. I hope, instead, that each missing term struck some chord with a viewer and that they thought that it merited preservation. While the *Your Moment of Bliss* works were designed to be ephemeral experiences of puzzlement and wonder, maybe each has found a more permanent home and now serves as a trigger for periodic contemplation and reflection. Perhaps the effects of these works are in a temporary dormancy and we are yet to see the public responses that they will engender.

This responsive and adaptable working method helped *Perplexecution* surpass my original, narrow intentions and resulted in a much more complex work. While this work

was not intended for widespread dissemination, it quickly attracted interest and established a life beyond my own local community. Early in the project, I had submitted a proposal to the Boston Center for the Arts to deliver a series of workshops that would begin with the participatory performance *Coinagitation* and introduce the participants to the community-based micro-interventions of *Perplexecution* as part of their public art residency. Unfortunately by the time that BCA had made its decision and invited me to present this project, I had agreed to teach in the University of Calgary's Department of Art. While we attempted to negotiate an alternative arrangement we could not find dates that were mutually agreeable, and since I was not in a financial position to undertake the creative opportunity and forsake the teaching income, I had to decline the offer. Soon after this disappointment I devised another *Perplexecution* and proposed it for *The Prostitution of Art*, organized and presented by Mobius, Inc. Coincidentally located in Boston, Mobius is one of the Northeast United States' longest running artist collectives. I was therefore thrilled when my submission was accepted as part of the juried series of performances and public interventions. The set of magnets I prepared featured the coinages, *ProstitART* and *ProstitARTute*, combined with soft-core porn inspired images of Jeff Koons and his partner, Cicciolina. As I posted the small envelope of art, Allan Kaprow's desire to devise the "mail-order Happening" work was not far from my mind. The works were displayed in Mobius throughout for *The Prostitution of Art's* series of performances, and then one of the project's curators, Jane Wong, dispersed them throughout the neighbourhood near the gallery and fulfilled the work's micro-interventionist intent.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Images of Jane Wong's interventions may be viewed on *The Prostitution of Art's* blog

Testing...Testing...Testing

While the bulk of the creative research for my thesis was complete, opportunities to disseminate the work continued as I completed the first draft of my thesis. As I still had my doubts about *Disambiguating*'s viability as a performance score and as a repeatable gesture, I thought I needed to once more test this idea. While exploring the idea of the Event Score implicit in *Disambiguating* I came across a call for proposals for an exhibition jointly hosted by the artist-run collectives Drift Station and Parallax Space of Lincoln, Nebraska. *Instructions for Initial Conditions* proposed to exhibit instruction and directive-based artworks that might be designed for either physical or mental execution. The only stipulation was that the work had to be presentable on a standard letter-size sheet of paper. I submitted two scores, one that had been realized (however unlikely that might have seemed) and the other a paradoxically imaginative property: "Draw *The Oxford History of Western Art* from Memory" and "Draw a Blank." Both were accepted for exhibition and included in the subsequent exhibition "manual." After the disheartening critical silence that had greeted *Disambiguating* this acceptance could not have come at a better time. As well, it gave me the faith to contemplate another durational performance work, the "labourious" performance, *Trace "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."* I decided to present the performance during the exhibition *Testing... Testing... Testing* that I had booked at the Department of Art's Little Gallery. Even before the work was executed, though, I noted the call for proposals for *Revisiting Ephemera*, a graduate conference and exhibition examining time-based and

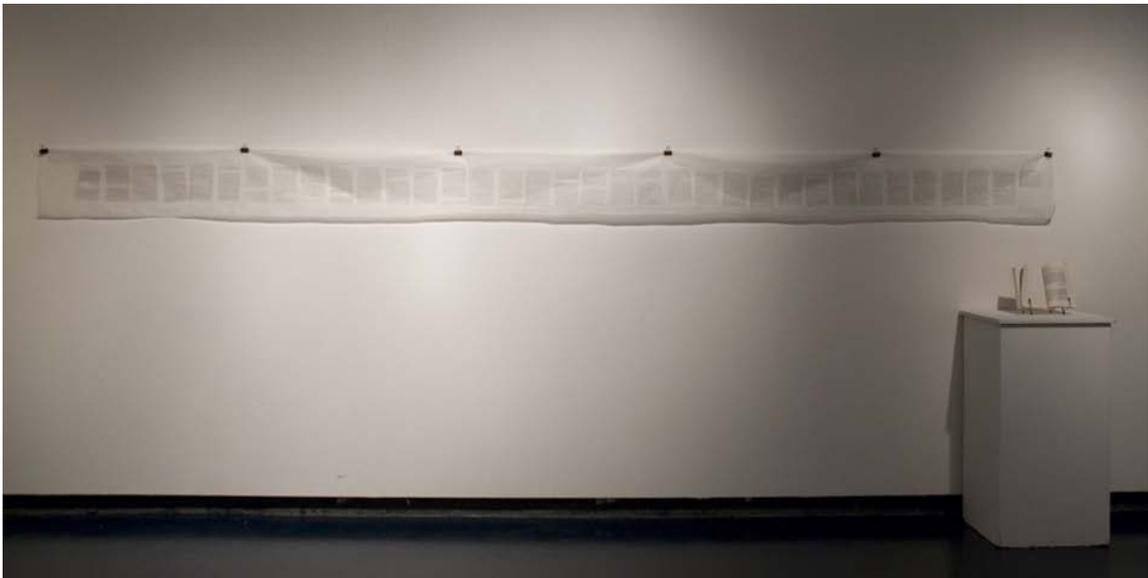
spot. As well, Wong posted our e-mail discussion concerning the works that I submitted for the exhibition and the difficulty exhibiting them at Mobius' apparently metal-free performance space. Please see <http://theprostitutionofart.blogspot.com/2010/11/poart-exhibit-richard-smolinski-51.html>

impermanent creative practices. My proposal that the post-performance remnants of my yet to be executed *Trace* project be exhibited at this congress was accepted by the conference organizers and the piece was later exhibited at the University of Western Ontario's artLAB. Even though I thought that the most efficient way to "lead by example" and to invite the greatest number of potential participants was to work directly with the audience, circumstances were then making it difficult to fulfill this ideal; while the dissemination of remnants seems a pale substitute for what I intended, I continued to feel a need to gain some traction in the world beyond my immediate academic setting.

Testing...Testing...Testing was a retrospective exhibition of the projects discussed throughout this chapter. Its title alluded to Avital Ronell's notion of *The Test Drive* where all knowledge and beliefs must be continually tested and re-tested, a process that perpetually checks their validity and enduring viability. *Coinagitation* was represented by a twenty-minute video of *CANCELdomy CALGARious* that documented my preamble, the participatory performance and the post-performance debriefing. As well, a metal chalkboard and a selection of magnetic letters invited portmanteau-coinage. To illustrate *Perplexecution*, in-situ photographs documenting *Your Moment of Bliss* were displayed and stacks of the magnetic "blissives" were available for gallery visitors to liberate and interject into their own communities. The practice of *Suffragency* was represented by both *Disambiguating* and *Trace* "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*" On one side of the gallery the Oxford source text and the two binders full of memory drawings were displayed, while the walls displayed many of the drawings completed by participants at the Ledge Gallery. A table complete with drawing supplies and the timer implied an open invitation to draw.

On the other side of the gallery I laboured away on *Trace*. During the tracing process I reproduced the most common translation of Benjamin’s essay (the one by Harry Zohn, published in the Hannah Arendt edited volume, *Illuminations*) using only graphite pencil. The performance was scheduled to last 35 hours, but I was able to complete the task somewhat earlier than anticipated. Unlike *Disambiguating*, *Trace* was almost a pleasure to work on. Rather than the taxing mental effort of recollection and stressful, timed interval of rendering that the first *Suffragency* required, *Trace* promoted a very meditative attention that only required that the pencil point follow and re-iterate the

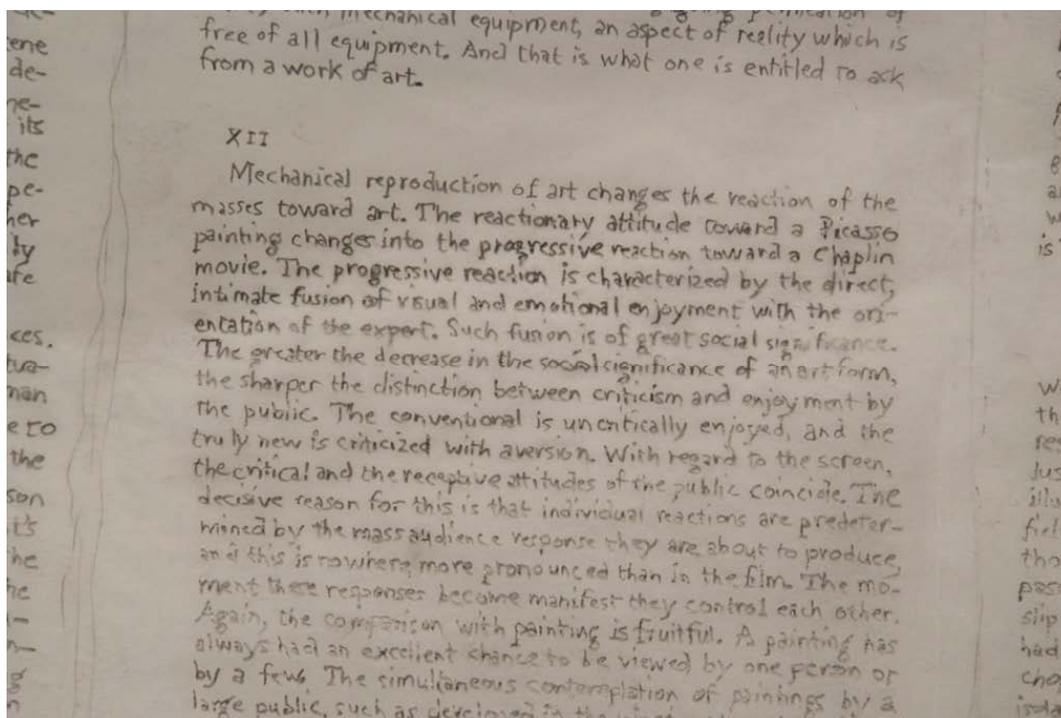
Figure 6.8: *Trace* “*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*” in exhibition, Little Gallery, University of Calgary, November 2010. Graphite on tracing paper, with Walter Benjamin’s source text. Photo: Kristine Thoreson.



plainly visible—the alphabetic and numerical characters, a handful of icons and the rectangular shape of each page. When the process was completed, the piece was unintentionally attractive; the nearly twenty-foot long scroll of tracing paper with its

delicate inscriptions was a strangely lovely image. Where I thought I was only establishing a practice that invited participatory engagement, I had accidentally created a work that surprised me with its beauty.

Figure 6.9: Trace “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” detail. Graphite on tracing paper. Photo: Kristine Thoreson.



As I worked away on *Trace*, a number of visitors participated in the exhibition by coining their own portmanteaux or by completing a drawing. One pair of participants were especially noteworthy, a young couple that spent a long time going through the displayed material before actually figuring out the implicit invitation to complete a “timed” drawings. They dutifully laboured through the allotted time and when the chime went off to end the interval, they examined each other’s results with much interest. Subsequently they located the fun-tack and adhered their drawings to the wall, contributing to the evolving display of participatory engagement. While by no means do I consider this the final proof for the validity of my ideas, it was a great example of how

the audience can recognize invitations to participate and embrace the opportunity to engage with creativity when given that opportunity.

Perhaps if I had better understood my desires for Fluid Authority from the outset of the research, the creative projects might have demonstrated a more rigorous design. Instead of developing projects that illustrated and executed pre-conceived ideas, within my research I located issues that required exploration and developed creative “experiments” accordingly. As such, the projects that explored Fluid Authority were responsive and expansive. Informed by the need to invite participation, the projects nonetheless were allowed to respond to circumstance and were often altered in the midst of their performative presentation. In visual art we often call this “allowing the medium (or the art) to have a life of its own”; it is a process where the artist works with their material and circumstances but the work develops in unimagined ways and reaches its own unexpected resolution. Such a methodology may result in challenging art but its creativity may also be at odds with the standards by which research is usually conducted. Such a fluid and responsive structure also makes it difficult to determine the relative success of an experiment. For instance, my method of *Coinagitation* proved to be a very efficient method for inviting participation and was thus, on one level, successful, and yet presenting the *Coinagitations* required me to lead the project, a structure that I had found problematic with Kester’s Dialogical art form and one that I have yet to fully resolve. My attempts to develop a type of work that the participant could more easily and independently engage with led me to explore my other two forms. While neither *Suffragency* nor *Perplexecution* ultimately proved to be infallible methods for inviting

audiences to experience creativity, they both demonstrated how the role of “artist” might be re-conceived so it might be more available to participating audiences.

Likewise, in the early stages of pursuing this combined creative and scholarly research, I might have developed a better means for recording and accounting for the viewer participation at the centre of the thesis. As I was thankful for the audiences’ acceptance of my invitations to participate and because through their engagement I began to consider them as my fellow artists, it seemed demeaning to automatically assume that the participants could simultaneously serve as “data.” While this may seem a weakness, I never pursued this research with the intention to establish anything as rigid as a law or to set new rules and fresh obligations in place. As my programme of study and my interests evolved, I hoped that a document that reflected upon a constellation of ideas and issues might suffice and that, at best, the work might suggest some alternatives to dominant practices. The examples of *Coinagition*, *Suffragency* and *Perplexecution* all were developed as working methods that might point to creative possibilities and illustrate that authorship was a process open and available to the willing. These practices might be imperfect realizations of the theory, but they are nonetheless techniques and ways of thinking/working that I will continue to pursue and make accessible to an ever-wider audience of participants. While they in no way exhaust the practice of Fluid Authority as I envision it, they serve as a series of accessible, re-usable and adaptable examples that might enable audiences to assume a participatory role and begin to explore the possibilities of authorship. As participation increasingly assumes a central role within contemporary creative practice, the objective of Fluid Authority is to suggest that participation might be a creative experience, not simply a compulsory one.

Concllutory

To cap off a project informed by the practice, I offer one final portmanteau for the road—concllutory. As an example of the idiosyncratic word-coinage technique, “concllutory” nicely hints at the notion of culminations even as it suggests the chimerical quality of all attempts at achieving closure and resolution. With an idea and a practice such as Fluid Authority, it is perhaps fitting to depart with some ambivalence, at one and the same time feeling that the main task was completed, yet realizing that the example of my work invites on-going investigation and deployment that resembles anything *but* an ending. It will be interesting to see how it plays out, especially since when I initially coined the catchy but loaded phrase “Fluid Authority,” I was not certain what it might be or whether it would be at all useful. As with many of my coinages, I first devised the term and then began to consider what it might mean and how it might be employed. Implicit in this particular phrase was my persistent desire to interrogate the authorial identity and the practice of creative “authority.” As authority often projects a sense of entrenched and embedded power, the term “fluid authority” seemed one informed by a crucial contradiction—a mercurial twist upon the stable and unassailable.

While the specific goals of the thesis were to understand audience participation and how creativity could be made more accessible, a covert aim of the project was to problematize “authorship” and suggest that, instead of it existing as accomplishment enabled by skill or talent, it might be an accessible and re-applicable practice on offer and available to willing participants. At the centre of this hope was the idea that the term “author” is not solely a noun that describes the identity of a creative practitioner, but also

a verb that identifies the active creative practice that establishes that identity. While that identity is often thought to signify an intrinsic characteristic, by taking part in the practice of authorship, an individual makes a claim upon the authorial identity. When s/he authors, that person accesses a creative process and set of conventions that may allow them to assume the identity of author. Unfortunately, as one *authors* one is both producing a creative work and asserting one's identification with the society of authors, or as it might be best to term it, the "authority." Like attempts to become a sorority sister or fraternity brother, those already included within the ranks of the authority may be reluctant to acknowledge a prospective author's efforts. While one might self-identify as an author, within the cultural field other authors may question the validity of an "authorial" claim and jealously guard the distinction. The act of "jealously guarding" an identity is, of course, a quality control mechanism, designed to preserve the identity's exclusivity. Part of the attraction of my foray into defining and applying the concept of Fluid Authority was to neutralize the assumption of exclusive privilege that is often associated with creativity and explore what might be possible if creativity was a more accessible practice. In place of quality control I imagined the idea of quantity proliferation. The notion of a cultural field populated by authors, creatively literate and capable of renewing the field's varied contents and shifting terrain, seems an attractive one and the example provided by Fluid Authority hopefully makes such a possibility imaginable.

Onward

While the present study has investigated how audiences are invited to participate in works of art and located some of the responsibilities that they take on as they embrace that offer, the study is far from exhaustive. The “legacy” of Allan Kaprow—a handful of flexible and adaptable examples—is very useful for my own nascent understanding of inviting participation, but it is easy to imagine alternative points of entry and a divergent repertoire of praxical examples that would also be capable of making creativity accessible to the audience. Likewise, this research project has illustrated how works of art are a recuperative medium, available for re-use and reconfiguration. The practices of re-doing, revisiting and re-mounting past works points towards an array of related issues (such as those of revision, adaptation, appropriation, quotation and allusion) that were beyond the scope of this research. Perhaps the future will allow an opportunity to explore such nuances and better understand the potential of such historically informed works of art. Thus, the implicit task of the research reveals alternative avenues that invite more investigation.

If I were to focus squarely upon the re-use and re-configuration of past works of art by contemporary artists, however, the work would privilege the “exclusive” field of art. Such an emphasis would focus upon acknowledged artists and established precedents too soon after I had invested a great deal of energy arguing for a practice that blurs the distinct identities of artist and audience, and that re-envision the specialist field of creative culture as an “inclusive” one. This change of emphasis would be doubly difficult in light of how I have stressed the pertinence of a participatory art form that promotes the audience’s creative engagement and that might help to balance the sort of audience

engagement favoured by relational art practices. Indeed, distinguishing between the participatory and the relational remains an issue of greatest importance because, as I argued above, the contemporary cultural field seems destined to make greater demands on its audience and designate participation as a *de rigueur* standard. In such a case, Fluid Authority's practice of creative participation offers the audience insight into the sorts of creative perspectives that form the cultural field and maps out ways that the audience may participate within this still privileged field. While it may not be able to stop the trend towards compulsory participation, Fluid Authority serves as an example of accessible creativity; because of the importance of this example, I imagine further explorations of the limits and the applicability of the theory and the practices of Fluid Authority.

While Fluid Authority in part answers the growing spectre of compulsory participation, one of my own forays into the form revealed that the practice might also have potentially obligatory aspects. This issue came up as I was committing my acts of "micro-intervention" and "community improvement" that were part of *Your Moment of Bliss*. Despite imagining that the project provided a benefit for its unsuspecting viewers, *Your Moment of Bliss* did have something of a "relate or else" dynamic. Such a quality should not be surprising since the project was informed by the example of interventionist art practice, a form whose coercive attempts to provoke a response are analogous to compulsory participation. Interventionist art often forms an adversarial relationship between the artist and the audience and, while I appreciate that the artistic prerogative includes confronting the audience's complacency, in these situations the audience's role consists of enduring an experience they neither sought out nor have chosen to be a part of. Remembering Grant Kester's idea of an "orthopedic" avant-garde, I wonder if this

confrontational attitude has not, over time, become a form of “artistic complacency,” a habitual assumption that the only productive relationship between artists and audiences are “formed” in the crucible of confrontation and that one party has the right to correct the faulty cognitive faculties and behavioural tendencies of the other. At the risk of simply turning the tables upon interventionist art and applying its own methods upon the practice, perhaps the form might benefit from a new perspective and more nuanced application. The example of Fluid Authority could provide interventionist art with a more balanced view of its audience and the goal of establishing a more cooperative milieu.

The critical lens provided by Fluid Authority might also prove useful for analyzing the audience’s experience of interventionist art’s surprise confrontations. When an intervention is launched, it is likely that the artist has some anticipated *re*-action in mind; the question worth asking is whether or not the audience is required to respond as the artist anticipates. Such a question points towards the issue of audience non-compliance and the refusal to participate. It is difficult to imagine the specifics of what the example of Fluid Authority might offer such a reluctant audience, although the form could serve as the basis from which to launch an investigation of creative dissidence. Indeed, it is exciting to imagine a perspective that resists compulsory participation by perceiving all invitations to participate as opportunities to challenge and subvert the artist’s predetermined plans, prescriptive experiences and anticipated responses. While my thesis research has depended on a cooperative and engaged audience, I often wonder what potentialities might exist within resistive and contrarian audiences.

Regardless of the direction that I ultimately follow, I aim to continue to balance creative and scholarly engagement, to offer artistic examples and develop theoretical

models that might be of use to other participants in the field of creative culture. Because of the potential of its example, I imagine continuing to explore the limits of Fluid Authority, expanding both the idea and its practical application. In articulating the practice of Fluid Authority, I intended to provide a critical lens that might be applicable to the investigation of audience participation, experiential creativity and the artwork as a retrievable and re-applicable medium. I hope that scholars, critics and artists find the idea relevant and applicable even to creative works that might appear to differ greatly from Fluid Authority, yet be analogous to the practice. Likewise, the creative projects that I developed were launched to serve as retrievable and revisable examples of the practice and it is my hope that they might continue to prove to be an effective medium for inviting audience participation and facilitating creative experiences. Ideally, the example of Fluid Authority will not only be of benefit, but will itself benefit from the creative re-use, re-application, adaptation and critical appraisal of other artists, scholars, theorists and participants in the cultural field.

References

- “About Artcity.” *Artcity Festival of Art, Design & Architecture*. Web. www.artcityfestival.com/about 22 November 2010.
- “About CAMPER.” *TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary*. Web. www.truck.ca/?maj=12camper&min=0camper 18 November 2010.
- “About Imaginary Ordinary.” *Imaginary Ordinary*. Web. <http://iimaginaryordinary.wordpress.com/about/> 20 November 2010.
- “About TRUCK.” *TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary*. Web. www.truck.ca/?maj=2abouttruck&min=0abouttruck 16 November 2010.
- Abramović, Marina. *Lips of Thomas*. 14 November 1975. Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck. Performance.
- . *Body Pressure*. 9 November 2005. Adaptation from Bruce Nauman, from the *Seven Easy Pieces* series. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Performance.
- . *Seedbed*. 10 November 2005. Adaptation from Vito Acconci, the *Seven Easy Pieces* series. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Performance.
- . *Action Pants*. 11 November 2005. Adaptation from VALIE EXPORT, from the *Seven Easy Pieces* series. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Performance.
- . *The Conditioning*. 12 November 2005. Adaptation from Gina Pane, the *Seven Easy Pieces* series. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Performance.
- . *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. 13 November 2005. Adaptation from Joseph Beuys, the *Seven Easy Pieces* series. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Performance.
- . *Lips of Thomas*. 14 November 2005. Adaptation from Marina Abramović, the *Seven Easy Pieces* series. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Performance.
- . *Entering the Other Side*. 15 November 2005. *Seven Easy Pieces* series. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Performance.
- . “Reenactment.” Introduction. *Seven Easy Pieces*. Milan: Charta, 2007. 9-11. Print.
- Acconci, Vito. *Seedbed*. 15-29 January 1972. Sonnabend Gallery, New York. Performance.

- Allen, Jennifer. "Care for Hire." *Right About Now: Art & Theory Since the 1990s*. Ed. Margariet Schavemaker and Mischa Rakier. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007. 142-54. Print.
- Alteen, Glenn. "Linea Lingua: Glenn Alteen Interviews." *Brunt Magazine* 1 (Summer 2005): 21. Web. <http://bruntmag.com/issue1/index.html> 10 July 2010.
- The Art of Participation*. Curator, Rudolf Frieling. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco. 8 November 2008-8 February 2009. Exhibition.
- Auslander, Phillip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Baldessari Sings LeWitt*. Dir. John Baldessari. 1972. Video, 00:12:50.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969: 217-51. Print.
- Berghaus, Günter. *Avant-Garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies*. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005. Print.
- Beuys, Joseph. *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. 26 November 1965. Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf. Performance.
- Bial, Henry, ed. *The Performance Studies Reader*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October* 110 (2004): 51-79. *Jstor*. Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3397557> 23 October 2011.
- . "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents." *Artforum International* 44.6 (2006): 178-83. *Academic One File*. Web. <http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/> 23 October 2011.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods." Trans. Richard Nice. *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980): 261-293. Web. <http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/2/3/225> 23 October 2011.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Dijon; Réel, 2002. Print.
- . *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. Ed. Caroline Schneider. Trans. Jeanine Herman. New York: Lukas & Steinberg, 2005. Web. www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/.../Bourriaud-Postproduction2.pdf 23 October 2011.

- . "Traffic: The Relational Moment," *theanyspacewhatever*. New York City: Guggenheim, 2008. 172-9. Print.
- Brzyski, Anna. "Introduction: Canons and Art History." *Partisan Canons*. Ed. Anna Brzyski. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. 1-25. Print.
- Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. "Cold War Constructivism," *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1954-1964*. Ed. Serge Guilbaut. Cambridge and London: MIT P, 1990. 85-112. Print.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1984. Print.
- Burton, Johanna. "Repeat performance: Johanna Burton on Marina Abramovic's Seven Easy Pieces." *Artforum International* 44.5 (2006): 55+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. <http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/ps/infomark.do?action=interpret&sPage=55&u=ucalgary&source=null&prodId=AONE&userGroupName=ucalgary&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&type=search&queryId=Locale%28en%2CUS%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28sn%2C%2910867058%3AAnd%3AFQE%3D%28ti%2C%29Repeat+Performance%3A+Johanna+Burton%3AAnd%3AFQE%3D%28vo%2C%2944%3AAnd%3AFQE%3D%28sp%2C%2955%3AAnd%3AFQE%3D%28iu%2C%295%24&version=1.0&authCount=1> 20 Aug. 2010.
- Butt, Gavin. "Happenings in History, or, The Epistemology of the Memoir." *Oxford Art Journal* 24. 2 (2001): 113-126. *Oxford Journals*. Web. <http://oaj.oxfordjournals.org/> 23 October 23 2011
- Camfield, William A. *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*. Houston: Houston Fine Art, 1989. Print.
- Carr, C. *On Edge: Performance at the End of the 20th Century*. Hanover: UP New England, 1993. Print.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There ... With Fifty Illustrations by John Tenniel*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 2000. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction Full-Text Database*. Web. 5 May 2011.
- Carroll, Noël. *On Criticism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Davis, Tracy C. "Closing Comments." Past Imperfect: Performance Studies Summer Institute Conference. Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. 10 July 2009.
- Debord, Guy. "Theory of the Dérive." *Situationist International Anthology*. Revised and expanded edition. Tran. Ken Knabb. 2006. N. pag. *Bureau of Public Secrets*. www.bopsecrets.org/SI Web. 30 November 2010.

- De Duve, Thierry. "When Form Has Become Attitude—And Beyond." *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*. Ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwood, 2005. 19-31. Print.
- De Haan, Jason. Personal Interview. 18 November 2006.
- Delany, Samuel R. *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957-1965*. New York: Arbor House/W. Morrow, 1988. Print.
- Demos, T.J. *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*. Cambridge and London: MIT P, 2007. Print.
- Downey, Anthony. "Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics." *Third Text* 21.3 (2007): 267–75. Web. *Ebsco Host*. 10.1080/09528820701360534 23 October 2011.
- Drucker, Johanna. "Collaboration without Object(s) in the Early Happenings." *Art Journal*, Vol. 52. 4 (1993): 51-8. *JStore*. Web. 22 November 2007. www.jstor.org/stable/777624
- "Duchamp's urinal tops art survey." *BBC*. 1 December 2004. Web. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4059997.stm> 14 July 2009.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce*. Trans. Ellen Esrock. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. Print.
- Edwards, Steve, ed. *Art and its Histories: A Reader*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1999. Print.
- 18 Happenings in 6 Parts (Re-doing)*. By Allan Kaprow. Dir. André Lepecki. Deitch Studios, Long Island City. 11 November 2007. Performance.
- EXPORT, VALIE. *Action Pants: Genital Panic*. 22 April 1969. Augusta-Lichtspiele, Munich. Performance.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. "Performance Art—Experiencing Liminality." *Seven Easy Pieces*. Milan; Charta, 2007. 33-45. Print.
- Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge and London: MIT P, 1996. Print.
- . "(Dis)Engaged Art." *Right About Now: Art & Theory Since the 1990s*. Ed. Margriet Schavemaker and Mischa Rakier. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007. Print.
- Frieling, Rudolf. Introduction. *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*. By Frieling. New York and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Thames,

2008.12-15. Print.

Fresh Acconci. Dir. Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy. Smart Arts, 1995. Video, 00:44:41.

Gablik, Suzi. "Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism." *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Ed. Suzanne Lacy. Seattle: Bay, 1995. 74-87. Print.

Gillick, Liam. Letter. "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.'" *October* 115 (2006): 95-107. Web. *Ebsco Host*. 10.1162/016228706775544961 14 June 2010.

---. *Audioguide Bench, Guggenheim, NY*. 2008, Dyed medium-density fibreboard.

---. *theanyspacewhatever Signage System*, 2008, Powder-coated, water-cut aluminum pieces. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan.

Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Abrams, 1988. Print.

---. *Performa: New Visual Art Performance*. New York: Performa, 2007. Print.

Greenberg, Clement. "Hans Hofmann: Grand Old Rebel." *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. IV: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-69*. Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago: U Chicago, 1993. 67-72. Print.

Groys, Boris. "A Genealogy of Participatory Art." *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*. Rudolf Frieling. New York and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Thames, 2008. 18-31. Print.

Guilbaut, Serge. "Introduction." *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1954-1964*. Ed. Serge Guilbaut. Cambridge and London: MIT P, 1990. Print.

Guillory, John. "Canon." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1990. 233-249. Print.

Hansen, Al. *A Primer of Happenings & Time/Space Art*. New York: Something Else, 1965. Print.

Henri, Adrian. *Total Art: Environments, Happenings and Performance*. New York: Praeger, 1974. Print.

Hassman, Peter. *VALIE EXPORT, Action Pants: Genital Panic*. 1969. Photograph. *Seven Easy Pieces*. Milan: Charta, 2007. 119. Print.

- Higgins, Dick. *Modernism Since Postmodernism*. San Diego: San Diego State UP, 1997. Print.
- Hopkins, Candice. "On Gesture and Becoming Animal." *How to Feed a Piano*. Ed. David Khang and Candice Hopkins. Vancouver: Centre A, 2008. N. pag. David Khang. Web. <http://www.davidkhang.com/text.htm#gesture> 10 July 2010.
- Houle, Terrence. *Paper Bag Tribal Suit*. 3 September 2006. Part of *The Patch Project*. Calgary Arts & Tattoo Festival, The Roundup Centre, Calgary. Performance.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York: Methuen, 1985. Print.
- Hwang, David H. "M. Butterfly." *The HBJ Anthology of Drama*. Ed. W.B. Worthen. Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1993. 962-84. Print.
- Ihle, Lucas. "18 Happenings in 6 Parts." *Bilateral Blog*. 13 November 2007. Web. <http://www.lucazoid.com/bilateral/18-happenings-in-6-parts/>. 21 January 2010.
- Imaginary Ordinary: a Community Mapping Project*. Renfrew, Regal Terrace, Crescent Heights, Calgary, Alberta. 8 May- 29 August 2009. Performance.
- Instructions for Initial Conditions*. Drift Station and Parallax Space, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA. November 5-29, 2010. Exhibition.
- Jensen, Robert. "Measuring Canons: Reflections on Innovation and the Nineteenth-century Canon of European Art." *Partisan Canons*. Ed. Anna Brzyski. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. 27-54. Print.
- Jones, Amelia. *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis and London: U Minnesota P, 1998. Print.
- Jones, Caroline A. *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2005. Print.
- Kaprow, Allan. *Untitled Environment*. Hansa Gallery, New York. March 1958. Environment.
- . *Untitled Environment*. Hansa Gallery, New York. November-December 1958. Environment.
- . "Notes on the Creation of a Total Art." (1958) Kaprow, *Essays* 10-12.
- . *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. Reuben Gallery, New York City. 4-10 October 1959. Happening.

- . *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. New York: Reuben Gallery, 1959. Performance programme. *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. 122. Print.
- . *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. New York: Reuben Gallery, 1959. Promotional poster. *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. 120. Print.
- . *The Big Laugh*. Reuben Gallery, New York. *A Program of Happenings* series. January 1960. Happening.
- . *Coca-Cola, Shirley Cannonball?* Judson Gallery, New York. *The Ray Gun Spex* series. February-March 1960. Happening.
- . *Apple Shrine*. Judson Gallery, New York. November 1960. Environment.
- (as Theodore Tucker).” Kaprow’s ‘Apple Shrine.’” (1960). *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. 138. Print.
- . “Happenings in the New York Scene.” (1961) Kaprow, *Essays* 15-26.
- . *Yard*. Martha Jackson Gallery, New York. *Environments, Situations, Spaces* exhibition. May-June 1961. Environment.
- . *Words*. Smolin Gallery, New York. September 1962. Environment.
- . *Chicken*. Young Men’s-Young Women’s Hebrew Association, Philadelphia. *Art 1963—A New Vocabulary* series. November 1962. Happening.
- . *Courtyard*. Greenwich Hotel, New York. November 1962. Happening.
- . “An Artist’s Story of a ‘Happening.’ ” *The New York Times*. October 6, 1963. 145.
- . *Birds*. Woods near a lake, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. February 1964. Happening.
- . *Birds*. 1964. *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. Illustrations 98 and 99. 165.
- . “The Happenings are Dead: Long Live the Happenings!” (1964). Kaprow, *Essays* 59-65.
- . *Self-Service*. New York, Los Angeles, and Boston. June-September 1966. Happening.

- . "A Statement." *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*. Ed. Michael Kirby. New York: Dutton, 1966. Print.
- . "Pinpointing Happenings." (1967) Kaprow, *Essays* 84-89.
- . "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I" (1971). Kaprow, *Essays* 97-109.
- . "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II" (1972). Kaprow, *Essays* 110-126.
- . "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III." (1974) Kaprow, *Essays* 130-147.
- . *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Ed. Jeff Kelley. Expanded ed. Berkeley: U California P, 2003. Print.
- "Kaprow Explaining *Household*." *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. Illustration 110. 173. Print.
- Kelley, Jeff. "Reinventing His Past." *Art in America*. 82.6 (1994): 80 (4). Web *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Gale. 2. <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/itx/start.do?prodId=EAIM>. 2 November 2007
- . *Childsplay: the Art of Allan Kaprow*. Berkeley: U California P, 2004. Print.
- . Introduction. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. By Allan Kaprow. Ed. Jeff Kelley. Expanded ed. Berkeley: U California P, 2003. xi-xxvi. Print.
- Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley: U California P, 2004. Print.
- . "Another turn." *Artforum International*. 44.9 (2006): 22(2). *Academic OneFile*. Gale. Web. <http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/ps/i.do?ty=as&v=2.1&u=ucalgary&it=search&s=DA-SORT&p=AONE&st=T002&dblist=AONE&qt=sn~10867058~ti~Another+Turn++~vo~44~sp~22~iu~9&sw=w> 18 May 2010.
- Khang, David. *M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)*. 10 November 2007. Tisch School for the Arts, New York University, New York City. Performance.
- . "M. Butterfly (After Shigeko Kubota)." *David Khang*. Web. <http://www.davidkhang.com/2007/Proj3/yr1.htm> 15 July 2010.
- Kirby, Michael. *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*. New York: Dutton, 1966. Print.

- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: U California P, 1998. Print.
- . "Performance Studies." *The Performance Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Bial. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. 43-55. Print.
- Kostelanetz, Richard. *On Innovative Art(ist)s: Recollections of an Expanding Field*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1992. Print.
- Kubota, Shigeko. *Vagina Painting*. Perpetual Fluxus Festival, Cinematheque, New York City. 4 July 1965. Performance.
- Lacy, Suzanne, ed. *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle: Bay, 1995. Print.
- Learning How to Love You More*. Web. www.learningtoloveyoumore.com 2 December 2010.
- Leja, Michael. "The Formation of an Avant-garde in New York." *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*. Ed. Michael Auping. New York: Abrams, 1987. 13-33. Print.
- Lepecki, André. "Redoing 18 Happenings in 6 Parts." "Allan Kaprow-18 Happenings in 6 Parts: 9/10/11 November 2006." Ed. Barry Rosen and Michael Unterdörfer. Göttingen: Steidel, 2007. 45-50. Print.
- . "18 Happenings in 6 Parts (Re-doing)." Director's program notes, New York City production. 2007. Print.
- LeWitt, Sol. "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art." *Artforum* Summer (1967): 79-83. Print.
- Li, Siu Leung. *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2003. Print.
- Lupyphiw, Wednesday. *Handi Crafts, Handy Cats*. 14 September 2006. Part of *The Patch Project*. ArtCity Festival, Olympic Plaza, Calgary. Performance.
- . Personal Interview. 22 November 2006.
- Maciunas, George. *Shigeko Kubota: Vagina Painting*. 1965. Photograph. Private collection. *Fluxus*. Ed. Thomas Kellein and Jon Hendricks. London: Thames, 1995. Plate 111. Print.
- Martin, Stewart. "Critique of Relational Aesthetics." *Third Text* 21.4 (2007): 369-86. Web. *Ebsco Host*. 10.1080/09528820701433323 23 October 2011.

- McEvelley, Thomas. *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Foundation of Post-Modernism*. Kingston and New York: McPherson, 2005. Print.
- McKenzie, Jon. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Mechling, Jay. *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. *ebrary—Academic Complete*. Web. <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/lib/ucalgary/docDetail.action?docID=10383912> 15 October 2011.
- “Medium.” *The Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed. Rev. 2005. Print.
- Meyer-Hermann, Eva. “The Museum as Mediation.” Trans. Fiona Elliott. *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. 72-89. Print.
- Miller, Larry. *Flux-Solo*. 10 November 2007. Tisch School for the Arts, New York University, New York City. Performance.
- The Ministry of Walking*. Web. www.ministryofwalking.ca 30 November 2010.
- . *The Postcard Project*. 13 August 2006. Part of *The Patch Project*. Afrikadey! Festival, Prince’s Island Park, Calgary. Curatorial Performance.
- Mogotin, Slava. “Uncut: Marina Abramovic” *Whitewall: Contemporary Art and Lifestyle Magazine: Whitewall daily edition*. August 4, 2010. Web. <http://www.whitewallmag.com/2010/08/04/uncut-marina-abramovic/> 21 August 2010.
- Morgan, Robert C. “Thoughts on Re-Performance, Experience, and Archivism.” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance & Art* 32.96 (2010): 1-15. *Ebsco Host*. Web. <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&hid=111&sid=8f6c680b-4824-4b1f-bf38-903051792372%40sessionmgr104> 13 October 2011.
- Moschopedis, Eric T. “Composing ‘the bubonic tourist: An Everyday Creative and Resistive Tourist Practice.’” MFA Thesis. University of British Columbia (Okanagan), 2008. Print.
- Moulton, Aaron. “RoseLee Goldberg’s PERFORMA.” *Flash Art (International Edition)* 38.58 (2005): n.p. *WilsonWeb*. Web. http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/hww/results/external_link_maincontentframe.jhtml?_DARGS=/hww/results/results_common.jhtml 4 December 2009.

Nauman, Bruce. *Body Pressure*. 4 February-6 March 1974. Performance score: stack of printed paper. Yellow Body, Galerie Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Version. Ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.

The Nike of Samothrace. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Exp. ed. Intro. Thomas McEvelley. Berkeley: U California P, 1999. Print.

Orrell, Paula, ed. *Marina Abramović + The Future of Performance Art*. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010. Print.

Pane, Gina. *The Conditioning, first action of Self-portrait(s)*. 1973. Performance.

Parreno, Phillipe. *Audioguide II, Guggenheim, NY*, 2008. Audio guide.

Performance Studies international. Web. <http://psi-web.org>. 27 December 2009.

"Postcard Project." *TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary*. Web. www.truck.ca/index.php?action=view&exnumber=146 9 December 2010.

"The Power 100." *Art Review (London, England)* 36 (2009): 73-135, 137. *Wilson Web*. Web. <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790e770910268787c47359e8c368bca5b3ee25e4844acf27b256ea6c9690dae6cb31&fmt=H>The Power 100 [Part of a special section: The Power 100]. *Art Review (London, England)* no. 36 (November 2009) p. 73-135, 137 19 May 2011.

"Precedings." Center for Research in Contemporary Art, University of Texas at Arlington, April 12-16, 1988. Conference.

The Prostitution of Art. Curation by Jane Wong and James Ellis Coleman. *Mobius*. Boston, Massachusetts, USA. 18-25 September 2010. Exhibition.

The Prostitution of Art: an Online Discourse and Multi-media Exhibition. Web. <http://theprostitutionofart.blogspot.com/2010/11/poart-exhibit-richard-smolinski-51.html> 28 October 2011.

"Recuperate." *The Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed. Rev. 2005. Print.

"Recuperation." *The Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed. Rev. 2005. Print.

- “Re-doing ‘18 Happenings in 6 Parts.’” Chair: Judith Rodenbeck. Shawn Greenlee, Stephanie Rosenthal, Christin Vahl, Noémie Solomon. *Performance Studies international #13: Happenings, Events, Performance*. New York University, November 7, 2007. Panel discussion.
- Reiss, Julie H. *From the Margin to the Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*. Cambridge and London: MIT P, 1999. Print.
- Revisiting Ephemera*. ArtLab, University of Western Ontario. 10-15 January 2011. Exhibition.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996. Print.
- Ronell, Avital. *The Test Drive*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 2005. Print.
- Rosenthal, Stephanie. “Agency for Action.” *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. 56-71. Print.
- Sandler, Irving, Paul McCarthy, Stephanie Rosenthal [and RoseLee Goldberg]. “Allan Kaprow: Art & Life.” *Art in America* 96.3 (2008): 132-37, 197. *Ebscohost* Web. <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=0e9e1343-2553-4cce-bdf5-9984b5bdd9ea%40sessionmgr115&vid=2&hid=110> 4 December 2009.
- Santone, Jessica. “Marina Abramović’s *Seven Easy Pieces*: Critical Documentation Strategies for Preserving Art’s History.” *Leonardo* 41.2 (April 2008): 147-52. *Project Muse*. Web. <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/leonardo/v041/41.2.santone.pdf> 20 August 2010.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Schimmel, Paul. “Only Memory Can Carry it into the Future: Kaprow’s Development from Action-Collages to the Happenings.” *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life*. Ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal. Los Angeles: Getty, 2008. 8-18. Print.
- Sejdel, Jorinde. “The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon.” *Open* 8.16 (2009): 4-5. Print.
- “Seppuku.” *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Web. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seppuku> 6 August 2010.
- Sell, Mike. *Avant-garde Performance & the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living*

Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement. Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 2005. Print.

SMOLinski, RICHARD. *Details from the BIG PICTURE*. F.A.B. Gallery, University of Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta. January 1999. Exhibition.

---. *CANCELdomy CALGARious*. TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary. Soap Box Series. 14 October 2009. Performance.

---. *Disambiguating*. Ledge Gallery, Epcor Centre for the Performing Arts, Calgary, Alberta. 4 March-30 April 2010. Performance.

---. "Happening Just North of Downtown, Up Centre Street: Reconnaissance and Reconfiguration in *Imaginary Ordinary's* Community-Mapping Project. *Imaginary Ordinary: A Community-Mapping Project*. Calgary: Eric Moschopedis, 2010. N. pag. Print.

---. *Your Moment of Bliss*. Calgary, Alberta. August-October 2010. Community micro-interventions.

---. *Testing...Testing...Testing*. The Little Gallery, University of Calgary. 1-9 November 2010. Exhibition.

---. *Trace "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."* Graphite on tracing paper. Collection of the artist.

---. *Trace "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."* The Little Gallery, University of Calgary. 1-5 November 2010. Performance.

---. *Coinagitation*. University of West Georgia. November 11, 2010. Performance.

Spector, Nancy. "Marina Abramović Interviewed," *Seven Easy Pieces*. Milan: Charta, 2007. 13-31. Print.

---. "theanyspacewhatever: an exhibition in ten parts." *theanyspacewhatever*. New York City: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2008. 13-27. Print.

Staniszewski, Mary Anne. *Believing is Seeing: Creating the Culture of Art*. New York: Penguin, 1995. Print.

Stewart, Susan. *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979. Print.

theanyspacewhatever. Curator, Nancy Spector. Solomon H. Guggenheim, New York. 24 October 2008-7January 2009. Exhibition.

- theanyspacewhatever*. Guggenheim On-Line Exhibition. Web.
web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/ exhibition_pages/.../exhibition.html
June 1, 2010.
- Thompson, Don. *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art*. Canada: Anchor Canada, 2009. Print.
- Tiravanija, Rirkrit. CHEW THE FAT, 2008. Documentary film portrait. Talk Talk Documentary and neugerriemschneider, Berlin. Video Installation.
- Traffic*. Curator. Nicolas Bourriaud. CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France. February- March, 1996. Exhibition.
- 24 Hour Psycho*. Dir. Douglas Gordon. 1993. Film, 24:00:00.
- Umatham, Sandra. "Beyond Documentation, or The Adventure of Shared Time and Place. Experiences of a Viewer." *Seven Easy Pieces*. Milan: Charta, 2007. 47-55. Print.
- van Winkel, Camile. "The Rhetorics of Manifesta." *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*. Ed. Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic. Cambridge: Roomade and MIT P, 2005. 219-232. Print.
- Vexation Island*. Dir. Rodney Graham. 1997. Video, 00:08:00.
- "Vexation Island." Web. *UbuWeb*. http://www.ubu.com/film/graham_vexation.html
6 May 2011.
- Vidor, Vuk. *Art History*. 2004. Wall painting. Palais de Tokyo, Paris.
- Wark, Jayne. *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2006. Print.
- Wawzonek, Donna. "Shifting Territory." *Shifting Territory: Artist-Run Centres and Exhibition Practice*. Donna Wawzonek and Andrew Hunter. Ottawa: Gallery 101, 2000. 7-45. Print.

