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*Social Practice Art and Community Art: What are the contrasting characteristics of
the two and do these genres fundamentally aim to meet common objectives?*

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Abstract

'Social Practice Art' and 'Community Art' in their various manifestations, use a range of approaches and mediums to engage with groups and communities, potentially effect social change, say something and make a difference. The lines between the two can be blurred, with aims and objectives crossing over. This paper looks at how performance art, dialogical art, activism art, participatory art and relational aesthetics, all play a role in some shape or form, either consciously or inadvertently, in shaping Community Art and Social practice Art. This paper looks at the similarities between the two art genres, their historical development and context in the United Kingdom and internationally, the impact and outcomes of specific projects and the influence of pioneers and leading advocates. Conflicting views of artists, practitioners and the absence of a consensus in recent academic research, demonstrates the complexity and elusiveness of clear definitions, interpretation and purpose of community arts and social practice art. This paper, informed by detailed analysis of available academic evidence, aims to clarify commonalities between the genres and examines disparate and contradictory views. The paper will demonstrate that the two art genres do have clear similarities with regard to aims, objectives and even in many cases, manifestations. However, increasing academic attention, focus and disputation has helped to shape the sophistication, diversity and most importantly, the abstract nature of social practice art. It is this level of discourse and analysis that often sets Social Practice art aside from community art.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to look at the contrasting characteristics of Social Practice Art (SPA) and Community Art and to conclude if the two genres fundamentally aim to meet common objectives.

Both Social Practice Art and Community Art use art in ways other than for traditional aesthetic purposes and use art to facilitate interactions with viewers or participants that can leave a lasting impression, change opinions and increase understanding of chosen subject matter. In his 'Aesthetics Textbook' Yuri Borev describes art as 'a sign system carrying certain information, and a specific channel of communication which serves to socialise individual experience of relations and encourage individual assimilation of collective experience'¹. He further suggests that art 'suggests a certain system of thoughts and feelings; its effect upon the psyche can be almost hypnotic'² and that 'It develops the aesthetic tastes, abilities and needs of man, thus providing him with a means of orientation in the world'³.

In view of the aesthetic adaptability of art, the scope for Community Art and Social Practice Art to develop communication channels and relationships between, individuals and communities is wide. The tools, methods and agendas of relevant artists and practitioners are varied, ranging from performance to object based and non-object based art in their manifestations. This paper will look at the similarities and differences that define **both** in terms of practical application and the way they are perceived by observers, using research and media in the form of lecture reviews, academic books and journals to support and extend my line of enquiry.

Chapter 1 of this research paper will look at some of the varied definitions of Community Art and Social Practice art, serving as a reference point and providing

¹ Borev, Y, Aesthetics Textbook (Progress Publishers Moscow 1985)

² ibid

³ ibid

some context and background for discussion. Unlike many other areas of art, there is not a wealth of documentation that chronicles the history and development of Community arts and social practice art. That being the case, one might expect to find clear and consistent definitions found in the limited available relevant writings. However consistent definitions of both are elusive. That said, the views of pioneers, leading practitioners and academics collectively albeit in different ways, describe the practice and purpose of the two forms of art practice.

Chapter 2 will look at some historical threads that map the development of Community Art and Social Practice Art and the events and social conditions that influenced artists and groups of artists. There are some key historical art movements and philosophies that have influenced both art genres and a few of these will be briefly discussed at the beginning of the chapter.

In connection with Community Art, the word 'community' gives a general sense of place and people living in a particular locality, with common concerns. It would follow that community art would therefore be art that serves, or works with, a particular community in some form or other and it could be argued that community art can be traced back through centuries from the first recorded artistic depictions of life within the most primitive of communities. For a historical perspective however, this chapter will focus on developments from the sixties, when specific activities were first labeled as community arts.

In the UK, the Free Form Arts Trust has been sponsoring and delivering community arts projects across the country for over forty years⁴. During this time the organization has lived through significant changes in social and political conditions and with this has come the need to re-focus, redefine and to an extent re-invent. The paper will look at the organizational challenges as well as the artistic approach and

⁴ Crehan, Kate, Community Arts an Anthropological Perspective (Berg 2011) pp 3-4

integrity of the trust against a backdrop of shrinking public funding for the arts. In addition, the influence of the Association of Community Artists, the works of pioneers such as Owen Kelly and commentaries by Su Braden will help to plot the history and chronology of community arts in the UK.

From an historical international community arts perspective, this paper will look at the development of The Bread and Puppet Theater, which was founded in 1963 by Peter Schumann on New York City's Lower East Side soon after his arrival from Europe. Schumann's puppet shows dovetailed as entertainment for children and as a tool for addressing a range of neighborhood issues. Bread and Puppets is an example of the breadth of community arts and its functionality as a tool to highlight social issues.

In connection with the history of social practice art, the range of descriptors such as socially engaged art, activism, dialogic, participatory and collaborative art⁵, perhaps explains the absence of specific reference to SPA predating the sixties. This chapter will look at the early works of Suzanne Lacy, a socially engaged artist with significant current influence and notoriety who produced seminal works at the end of the sixties, some of which will be discussed as an early example of a radical, issue specific manifestation of SPA. However, this chapter will also demonstrate that certain manifestations of SPA have their roots in or are consciously or subconsciously inspired by the 'Anti Art' movements such as Dada and Fluxus, that commenced in the early part of the twentieth century. With such a wide range of definitions and examples, it would not however be accurate to link the development of all manifestations of SPA to Dada and Fluxus, particularly when looking at contemporary examples such as Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses that blurs the lines between art, social work and education and where like other examples of social practice art, the artist is not a central figure but more of a facilitator of participation.

⁵ Helguera, P, Education For Socially Engaged Art (Jorge Pinto Books 2011) p 3

The influence of movements such as Dada and Fluxus and Rick Lowe's specific project will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

Chapter 3 will look at two contemporary cases studies as a reference point for critical analysis. These are the Rick Lowe Project Row Houses project⁶ referred to above and the works of the Austrian art collective, Wochenklausur. The Project Row Houses project is an example of SPA that leans towards social provision and pedagogy and Wochenklausur, an art practice that uses 'interventions' to effect social change. These two exponents are far apart in manifestation but both are considered to be socially engaged, demonstrating the diversity and breadth of manifestations of SPA. With both these practices focusing on tackling issues of concern in specific communities, comparisons can be made with examples of contemporary community arts projects and this will also be explored in this chapter

The constraints of this paper will not allow for an in depth exploration of all the numerous sub-genres connected with SPA, a few of these are listed earlier in this introduction. However it will be necessary to discuss additional influences and descriptors such as relational aesthetics and new genre public art. A discussion on the definitions, breadth of understanding and manifestation of both social practice art and community art, along with analysis of historical development and current application, will form the basis for concluding findings and provide answers in relation to the questions and concerns raised by this paper.

⁶ <http://projectrowhouses.org>

Chapter 1

1.1: Definitions: Community Art

It is easy consider community arts as being small scale, local authority funded projects in community centres facilitated by artists working independently with groups, giving access to the arts to people who might not ordinarily have the opportunity and indeed there are many such examples. However the term community arts, refers to art in its broadest sense and can include elements of object based art, and performance in the form of music, dance and theatre. As such, the scope and scale may not have limits and contemporary definitions indicate that community art is multi-faceted and has a variety of objectives and applications.

Sally Morgan, formerly Head of Art & Social Context at the University of the West of England, describes community art as being different from public art or art in the community because it 'has a long term cultural and political ambition'⁷. This particular view indicates the existence of a conscious socio-political objective. This is echoed by Owen Kelly who supports a GLA (Greater London Authority) arts Committee's definition which states that 'community arts does not refer to any specific activity or group of activities, rather it defines an approach to creative activity, embracing many kinds of events and a wide range of media [...] Community Arts proposes the use of art to effect social change and affect social policies'⁸.

Both definitions present community art as a tool to influence social change, with the GLA definition also emphasizing its multi-faceted nature in terms of presentation and media. Kelly also describes community artists as being 'distinguishable by their

⁷ Dickson, M, Art With People (A N Publications 1988) p 18

⁸ Kelly, O, Community Art and The State (Comedia 1984) pp 1-2

attitude towards the place of their activities'⁹ indicating an attachment to a specific community or place.

In her paper 'Community Arts a Little Historical Context', Maryo Ewell sees community art as being 'of and by the people of a place and culture, often facilitated by a professional artist. It reflects the values, concerns and meaning of living in that place or culture'¹⁰. This definition makes no direct reference to a socio-political agenda and suggests a more inward looking and perhaps parochial community approach or use.

To further demonstrate the breadth of definitions and diversity of community art, in the International Journal of Education Through Art Coutts and Jokela define community art as 'A form of education through art. It is also an area of artistic and educational practice that tends to take place in settings that one would not normally associate with education, for example, in the streets of towns and cities and in rural, isolated or marginalised communities'¹¹. In this particular definition, we see a link to pedagogy and the use of community art as an educational tool.

1.2: Definitions: Social Practice Art (SPA)

It is important to note that the terms Socially Engaged Art, New Genre Public Art, Dialogical Art and Activism Art amongst others, are all used to describe Social Practice Art and although Social practice art is increasingly the subject of discourse between artists and academics, these varied descriptions perhaps explain why a specific and consistent definition is elusive. The renowned artist, author and

⁹ Kelly, O, Community Art and The State (Comedia 1984) pp 1-2

¹⁰ Ewell, M, Community Art a Little Historical Context (Grantmaker in The Arts Vol. 22 Summer 2011)

¹¹ Coutts, G, and Jokela, T International Journal of Education Through Art (Sept 2012)

academic Pablo Helguera elects to use the term Socially Engaged Art (SEA) to encompass all of the above, after much analysis of the range of terminology used to label this art form. He describes SEA as “a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art”¹². This reference to non-art alludes to the non-object based characteristic of many manifestations of SEA. In socially engaged art, the artist is not of central importance, collaboration and the participation of others is crucial and in the same way as community art, SEA’s use of a wide range of media, including performance, takes art away from traditional spaces and into spaces that might not normally be associated with art. These dialogical, participatory manifestations are discussed in great detail in Grant Kester’s ‘Conversation Pieces’¹³ where the referenced works of various socially engaged artists demonstrate the objective of facilitating dialogue and an exchange of ideas in order to effect social change or draw attention to socio-political issues of concern and where there is not necessarily any existence of an object that might be described as art.

To take this theme further, the simple term ‘Social Practice’ is also commonly referred to. Here the use of the word ‘art’ is conspicuous by its absence and opens the door to a practice that some might argue has nothing to do with art at all. Examples such as Rick Lowe’s Project Row Houses, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper, is not only art focused but delivers tangible societal benefits in the form of education, housing provision and support for a vulnerable community group. Linda Shearer (Chief Executive of Project Row Houses) said of Rick Lowe that “he pioneered a form of art had no name, now his concept is taught in undergraduate and graduate art programs. It’s called creative place making and social practice”¹⁴. The outcomes of the project are considered by some to deliver

¹² Helguera, Pablo, *Education For Socially Engaged Art* (Jorge Pinto Books 2011) p 8

¹³ Kester, Grant, *Conversation Pieces* (University of California Press 2004) pp 82-123

¹⁴ Houston Chronicle September 2014

social programmes that arguably represent a function that should be the responsibility of the state in terms of social welfare provision. The project has been widely acclaimed in the USA, leading to Lowe's appointment by President Obama, to the National Council On the Arts in the USA.

In his article in The New York times in May 2013, Randy Kennedy states that Social art "practitioners freely blur the lines among object making, performance, political activism, community organizing, environmentalism and investigative journalism, creating a deeply participatory art that often flourishes outside the gallery and museum system"¹⁵. Again asking the question "is it art?". This blurring of lines appears to imply that Social Practice art is perhaps all of the above, with the simple common thread that the instigator of participation or decision maker in terms of utilization of media is an artist.

Rick Lowe's tangible, social intervention and Kennedy's description that refers to politics and investigative journalism allude to an overtly socio-political and utilitarian application. In the International Socialist Review, Ben Davis writes, "Social practice, thus, can be seen as something like a radicalization of a recent trend, picking up on the intellectual armature of relational aesthetics but attempting to give it a more explicitly political edge to escape the latter's incorporation into the art industry"¹⁶. Links to relational aesthetics will be discussed later in this paper but Davis' view implies an explicitly political functionality but also indicates a conscious objective to distance from the traditional art world.

In terms of definition, there are clear similarities between community art and SPA,

¹⁵ Kennedy, R, Outside The Citadel, Social Practice art is intended to nurture (New York Times May 2013)

¹⁶ Davis, Ben, A Critique of Social Practice Art (International Socialist Review issue 90 July 2013)

particularly in relation to their use of art or the arts to deliver socio-political messages, utilizing a range of art and performance media. However there are subtle differences, with community art perhaps more parochial and attached to a locality or community whereas SPA is predominantly more overtly political with single issue, socio political messaging and more consciously non-object based, an argument to be explored later in this paper. The recurring question asked of SPA, 'is it art?' does not appear to be as commonly directed towards Community Art, suggesting that there is a view of SEA as being consciously more conceptual, abstract and distant from the rest of the art world. How both fields of art have developed, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

2.1: Historical Influences - Community Art and Social Practice Art

The definitions of Community Art and SPA in the previous chapter indicate clear similarities in the aims and objectives of the two genres. This chapter will explore some historical events and philosophical influences that have shaped the development of both genres over the past forty years.

In Marxist art theory, art is seen as commodity in a capitalist society, where artists are cultural producers in a capitalist system, making art as an artefact to be bought and sold as objects of desire. Art in a capitalist society is seen as a consumer object and therefore also an object of desire. Conversely art is seen as a means by which the proletariat (or working class) can free themselves and their minds from their struggles in a capitalist society, and initiate revolution. Throughout this paper, reference has been made to Community and Social Practice Artists having a desire to work outside of the traditional, non inclusive art world and to use art as a medium to effect change.

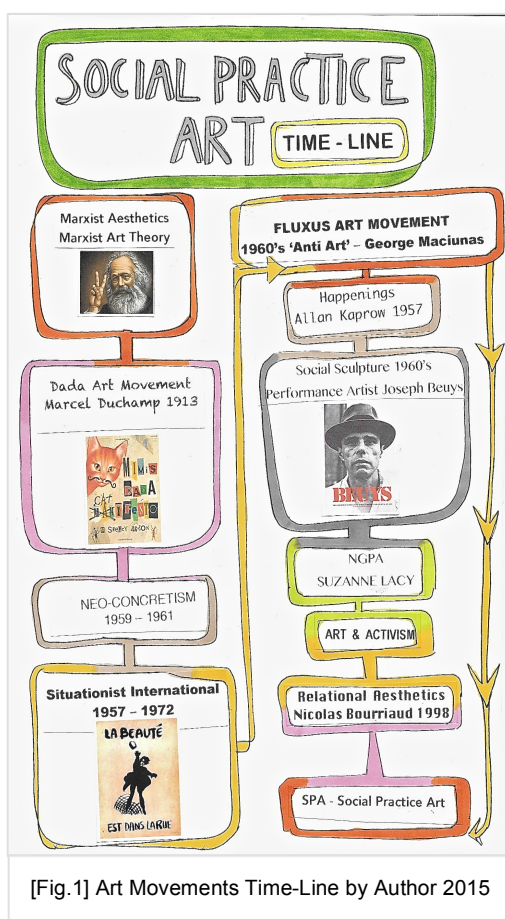
Although Community Art and SPA practitioners challenge the Marxist description of artists as 'cultural producers', there is a view amongst some commentators and critics that Community Arts and SPA are increasingly, perhaps unwittingly, providing functions on behalf of governments and filling in gaps in state social provision. This is anathema to Marxists art theory, where there is a belief in change being instigated by the people and not imposed on them but controlled by the state. Grant Kester points to an example of this in the nineties and the emergence of New Labour in the UK with its 'de-radicalized Marxism'¹⁷ and use of community arts for social cohesion purposes rather than to facilitate political expression. Further examples of this will be

¹⁷ Kester G, *The One and The Many* (Duke University Press 2011) p 198

shown later in this paper.

Writings regarding Marxist art theory are exhaustive and there is not the room to explore this in greater detail in this paper. However it is clear that although Marxist art theory was written from the perspective of an overtly anti-capitalist and revolutionary perspective in the 19th century well before the emergence of what is recognized as Community Art and SPA, Marxist art theory underpins Community and SPA objectives, either consciously or subconsciously.

In addition to the principles of SPA, both utilize a locations and indicated in the is unlikely that the some of these would have been ground not been two important art the early part of the Fluxus from the



[Fig. 1] Art Movements Time-Line by Author 2015

underlying Marxist Community Art and variety of media, methods, as definitions chapter. It abstract nature of manifestations possible had the broken by at least movements, Dada in 20th Century and late 1950's.

Dada was an artistic and literary movement that began in 1916 in Zurich, Switzerland, although, the term was coined by Marcel Duchamp in 1913. It came to be as a reaction to World War I. Its manifestations were diverse, ranging from performance art to poetry, photography, sculpture, painting and collage.

Beginning in the late fifties, Fluxus was a loosely organized movement, with a strong presence in New York City but with representation across the world. Fluxus artists were avidly anti the established art world and its related constraints and formality. Fluxus not only wanted art to be available to everyone, they also wanted everyone to produce art all the time. Fluxus art involved the viewer, relying on the element of chance to shape the ultimate outcome of the piece.

The influence of Marxist Art Theory, Dada and Fluxus will be seen at points later in this paper.

A further important influence on the development of Community art and SPA were the major socio-political events of the 1960s. This was a pivotal period in history, against a backdrop of social unrest characterized by race riots in the USA, uprisings against the state in Czechoslovakia, student riots in France and growing opposition to the War in Vietnam.

At the same time, much of the western world was experiencing economic growth, an increase in



[Fig. 2] History Makers: The struggle for civil rights,
Rochester. 1960s

leisure activity, new freedoms allowing for increased politicization and confidence amongst many to challenge government decision making.

In the UK these conditions helped to galvanise artists and activists. In his book 'Community, Art and The State' Owen Kelly pinpoints this period as the beginning of

the community arts movement, with the qualification that 'it had no definite starting point since from its beginnings it was a movement loosely based on the retrospective recognition of the similarities of aim and method of the work of its founders'¹⁸. There was no conscious, structured development but a realization that many artists had been approaching their work in similar ways. In keeping with this, it is clear that whilst there were a multitude of 'community artists' practicing across the country, there was no recognized, collective movement.

The same absence of a collective consciousness or specific label of art movement throughout the 1960s and 70s, can be said of SPA. This can be explained through the definitions in Chapter 1, where Helguera points to the hybrid, multi-disciplinary nature of SPA. This would hinder the development of an organized, collective consciousness. Suzanne Lacy alludes to this in her definition of 'New Genre Public Art' where she states that 'for the past three or so decades visual artists of various backgrounds and perspectives have been working in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility'¹⁹. Lacy cites conceptual performance artist Lowell Darling and community artist Judith Baca as examples²⁰. These two artists were socio-politically driven but with differing methods and not part of a collective movement.

In the remainder of this chapter, a number of brief case studies from the UK and USA will help to show how community art and SPA have developed in-line with the influences described above. The numerous examples of Community Art practice reflect its relatively recognizable historical categorization, whilst the single study of Suzanne Lacy as an example of early SPA practice, reflects the elusiveness of the genre.

¹⁸ Kelly, Owen, *Community Art and The State* (Comedia 1984) p 9

¹⁹ Lacy, Suzanne, *Mapping the Terrain*, (Bay Press 1994) p19

²⁰ *ibid.* p20

2.2: Free Form - 1969

Free Form, was founded by like-minded fine art graduates Martin Goodrich, Jim Ives and Barbara Wheeler-Early, who had the aim of using their art and art education to support vulnerable 'working class' communities and to take art out of traditional gallery spaces and into a sphere that allowed access to individuals and



[Fig. 3] Free Form. Discussing Mural Design. Provost Estate. London. 1985

communities who might not normally view or participate in art.

This rejection of the traditional art world was inherently complex and to an extent contradictory. Firstly Free Form, although inspired and influenced by turbulent socio-political times, did not set out specifically to use art to challenge events and issues that occurred outside of target communities. Kate Crehan states that one of the objectives of Free Form is 'to make art relevant to working class people'²¹.

The work of Free Form was largely produced from a community based setting in the east end of London and demonstrated the breadth of manifestations of community arts. The group began in 1969 with schools based workshops where the objective was to get children to understand the value of the arts. With local authority funding,

²¹ Crehan, Kate, Community Arts an Anthropological Perspective (Berg 2011) p 22

projects continued with schools but expanded to events, in collaboration with a range of artists and community members. This included wall paintings, neighbourhood fun days and festivals that took on carnival-like characteristics in the form of street performance, pyrotechnics and from 1973 to 1975, performance art in collaboration with the 'Combination Community Theatre Group'²².

Increasingly distancing itself from gallery-based representation, during the 70's, Free Form extended its practice to environmental focused community work, linked to urban regeneration and local place improvement in the form of collaborative landscaping, design and murals. Projects were supported via funding made available as a result of political recognition that many housing plans of the sixties had created environments not best suited to ensure the well-being of residents. Free Form continues in this vein to date under the name 'Free Form Arts Trust', as an example of art delivering community and environmental projects with the community and children at its heart.

"Free Form is unique in providing the full range of arts and creative services for the built environment to place art at the heart of urban regeneration"²³

2.3: Association of Community Artists (ACA) 1972 - 1980

As observed by Owen Kelly, in the late 60's and early 70's there were numerous community art practitioners in the UK delivering projects with similar aims and objectives but operating in relative isolation, with no collective identity or overarching arts movement. As a result of this recognition, the Association of Community Artists (ACA) was founded in 1972. One of the founders, Martin Goodrich was also founder of Free Form. The ACA provided representation for artists, a means of networking and a powerful national body to lobby the Arts Council for funding in competition with

²² Crehan, Kate, Community Arts an Anthropological Perspective (Berg 2011) pp 66-67

²³ Free Form Website, <http://www.younghackney.org/>

the traditional art world. Sally Morgan writes of the ACA, 'in my opinion ACA was the single most important element in the forging of the community arts movement. Through it we discovered each others' work and ideologies' ²⁴.

The ACA was clearly instrumental in galvanizing community artists in the UK and acting as a focal point and representative. However with a breadth of passionate artists across the country and with shrinking funding against a backdrop of Thatcherism and neoliberal²⁵ politics, ideological clashes and in-fighting began to



[Fig. 4] Margaret Thatcher. London 1980. The Guardian National Archives

characterize the ACA, left versus hard left, urban versus rural and centralists versus decentralization to name a few. Inevitably the ACA ceased to be in 1980.

2.4: Bread and Puppet Theatre

The turbulence of the sixties and post WW2 new freedoms influenced individuals, communities and artists across the world. The reasons for the burgeoning Community Art movements in the UK were the same as those in the USA where community arts groups such as the Bread and Puppet Theatre, began to flourish. The Bread and Puppet theatre was founded in 1963 by sculptor, dancer and musician Peter Schumman, soon after his arrival in New York from Poland. Whilst providing hand-puppet entertainment for children, productions also addressed

²⁴ Dickson, Malcolm, *Art With People* (A N Publications 1988) p 17

²⁵ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/245592?redirectedFrom=neoliberal#eid>

community concerns such as high rents and policing. Productions expanded to the use of life-size puppets, community participation and incorporating dance and music.



[Fig. 5] Bread and Puppets, Uprising of the Beast, 1990

When necessary, particularly in connection with the Vietnam War, Bread and Puppets was overtly political, using the medium of puppetry to deliver protest messaging rather than the spoken word. “I am a picture maker. In a picture you grasp something in a different way than in words. In a picture you grasp an idea in one instantaneous image. With words you grasp it through logic, through reason, and it’s just a different process in the mind”²⁶

Bread and Puppet Theatre continues to produce works today, funded by touring and merchandise sales across the world.

²⁶ Van Erven, Eugene, personal interview with Peter Schumman, 28 December 1983
Community Art Dialogues (Treaty of Utrecht Foundation 2013) p 11

2.5: Suzanne Lacy 1967. USA

From the early seventies Suzanne Lacy has used a transdisciplinary approach, encompassing many of the influences referred to above, to deliver her art practice. Manifestations of Lacy's works include photography, film, solo performance art, interactive installation and public site-specific activist performance. Lacy coined the term New Genre Public Art in her book 'Mapping The Terrain'²⁷ to distinguish her work and that of similar artists as different 'in both form and intention from what has been called "public art" - a term used for the past twenty five years to describe sculpture and installations sited in public spaces'²⁸.

Lacy used the term New Genre Public Art to describe practices and approaches that 'interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives'²⁹. Lacy's early works in the seventies were feminist and activist based, focusing on issues such as women's rights, rape and domestic violence, with a clear movement away from object based art using the wide range of media detailed above.



[Fig. 6] Suzanne Lacy. Three weeks in May (1977)

The historical threads explored in this chapter demonstrate that significant global political events and changes in socio-political conditions provided the catalyst for the emergence of both Community Art and SPA in the sixties and seventies. The

²⁷ Lacy, Suzanne, Mapping the Terrain, (Bay Press 1994)

²⁸ Lacy, Suzanne, Mapping the Terrain, (Bay Press 1994) p19

²⁹ ibid p19

diversity of manifestations and activism were driven by new freedoms and a sense that artists had the ability to contribute to societal change. Additionally, from a philosophical point of view, the two genres are underpinned by a conscious or subconscious Marxist approach to art, albeit watered down and reflecting societal changes, within the restrictions of a largely capitalist world. The following chapter will in some detail look at some contemporary practice, manifestations and social context of both art genres.

Chapter 3

3.1: Contemporary Case Studies

In chapter 2 of this paper, a number of examples were used to plot the historical path of community arts practice. However in connection with SPA, the single Suzanne Lacy reference reflects the elusiveness of the genre in terms of categorization. The term SPA, to describe a collective approach to art practice, has been in use for a relatively short time. Nevertheless, contemporary discourse and critical analysis around this art genre is extensive and there are now several examples of practice that can sit comfortably under the SPA definition. Accordingly, this chapter looks at two such contemporary SPA practices and the connection to the ethos of community art.

3.2: Wochenklausur

Since 1993 the Austrian artist collective Wochenklausur has been conducting social interventions, with the aim of making sustainable, long-term improvements to the lives of people in the communities in which they operate. Wochenklausur's methods are fundamentally dialogical and participatory. In over 40 works since 1993, there is an absence of the production of a physical object that might be described as art. Examples over the years include Medical care for homeless people, a shelter for drug addicted women, implementation of an intermediate social work and a women-led workers cooperative to name a few.

In terms of artistic relevance, this absence of artefact or object in the Wochenklauser practice, arguably sits under Bourriaud's description of a relational aesthetic³⁰, in which he attempts to define and clarify a shift in artistic practice in the 1990s. Bourriaud's collection of essays describes an artistic approach with the emphasis on communication, the exchange of ideas and without the need for an object-based

³⁰ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les Press Du Reel 2002)

outcome, art that has its scope as ‘the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space’³¹. Whilst Bourriaud’s book does not suggest a specific socio-political dimension to relational aesthetics (RA) manifestations of both Community Art and SPA, particularly in participatory, dialogical and performance terms, clearly allow for alignment with RA. This is supported by the Ben Davis view on SPA cited in chapter 1 of this paper as ‘picking up on the intellectual armature of relational aesthetics but attempting to give it a more explicitly political edge to escape the latter’s incorporation into the art industry’³².

Wochenklausur’s themes and areas of intervention demonstrate a clear activist approach, aimed at improving social conditions. The shelter for drug-addicted women (1994) was a prime example of dialogical, participatory work. Sex workers, politicians, journalists and activists held a series of meetings on a boat on Lake Zurich over several weeks to discuss issues affecting the sex workers such as health, police harassment and homelessness.



[Fig. 7] Shelter for drug addicted Women. Zurich (1994)
WochenKlausur use art to shape political reality.

The setting and process was alien to the majority of participants but created a level platform, allowing a dialogue that would ultimately lead to the establishment of a boarding

house/safe-haven for the sex workers. This project is discussed in Kester’s ‘Conversation Pieces’, referring to the words of artist Peter Dunne who describes the

³¹ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les Press Du Reel 2002) p14

³² Davis, Ben, *A Critique of Social Practice Art* (International Socialist Review Issue 90 July 2013)

type of art as 'context providers rather than content providers'³³. Wochenklausur's work facilitates, and creates conditions for dialogue, without dictating the content or outcome of discussions.

As a means of clarifying purpose and objectives, the Wochenklausur website is specific in defining its social practice objectives and philosophy³⁴. 'Art should no longer be venerated in specially designated spaces. Art should not form a parallel quasi-world'³⁵. This view, with its elitist, accessibility and inclusion concerns, can also be seen in community arts objectives as far back as the 1960's, exemplified by Free Form in chapter 2 of this paper. Wochenklausur further assert that 'Art should deal with reality, grapple with political circumstances, and work out proposals for improving human coexistence'³⁶ and in line with Relational Aesthetics has, 'a profound doubt of the notion that art can only be fixed in the object'³⁷.

Where then is the art in Wochenklausur? There is the dialogical, participatory non-object based relational aesthetic, however it could be argued that the process and objectives are not artistic but functions of well meaning activists with a social conscience. Wochenklausur justifies its connection with the art world with the view that 'we are artists so we can call anything we do art'³⁸. Whilst this arguably simplified self-description must be respected, it is worth suggesting that the creative approach to problem solving can itself, be considered art.

³³ Kester, Grant, Conversation Pieces Grant (University of California Press 2004) p1

³⁴ <http://www.wochenklausur.at>

³⁵ <http://www.wochenklausur.at>

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ <http://creativetime.org/summit/2011/09/23/wochenklausur/>

3.3: Rick Lowe, Project Row Houses (PRH)

In the early nineties, inspired by the sentiments of local students and friends, artist Rick Lowe set out to undertake work that did not simply reflect what was going on in the community but work that offered or helped with solutions. Lowe focused on community regeneration and organized the purchase of 22 derelict 'shotgun houses'³⁹ in a run down, predominately Afro American neighbourhood of Houston, Texas.



[Fig. 8] Photograph of PRH before renovation. January 1993. Courtesy of PRH

The houses were renovated and transformed, in collaboration with residents, artists, architects, planners and church groups, into artist studio spaces, a commercial and office space and a local gallery. A young mothers program offering temporary

³⁹ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1995794/shotgun-house>

affordable housing to a handful of young women each year was also established as well as education programmes, mentoring and job training.



[Fig.9] Andrea Bowers's installation, 'Hope in Hindsight' on view at Project Row Houses in 2010. Photo by Eric Hester. Courtesy Project Row Houses.

In addition to the PRH urban regeneration objective, one of its aims was to 'to shift the view of art from traditional studio practice to a more conceptual base of transforming the social environment'⁴⁰ a common aim of the community arts movement in the 1960s and 70s.

Project Row Houses has been extremely successful as a community project. However this mix of art, urban regeneration and social practice has resulted in extensive discourse and critique, with questions asked about the project's artistic credentials. In 'Living as Form' Nato Thompson asks of PRH 'If it can be included as a socially engaged artwork, why not include more nonprofit organizations as artworks

⁴⁰ <http://projectrowhouses.org>

as well?⁴¹. In addition, Ben Davis writes in the International Socialist Review (ISR) that PRH 'is vulnerable to all the weaknesses of non-profit focused activism: Having to lower one's rhetoric in order to please donors, mopping up the symptoms of social problems instead of going after the disease itself, and, ultimately, reducing the vital work of political organizing to a symbolic gesture - the very pitfall of political art that political artists have always tried to escape'⁴². Here Davis implies that PRH might be carrying out functions that should be the responsibility of a neglectful state, rather than challenging and campaigning to change minds and policies. This, like the interventions of Wochenklauser, might be seen as an example of the Kester description of a de-radicalized Marxism cited in chapter 2 of this paper.

To add to the uncertainty surrounding this particular project, Lowe himself suggests that with the increased focus and academic discourse, social practice might very well be gentrifying community art, as community artists struggle to compete for funding with social practice artists who have 'credentials' as he puts it.⁴³ PRH is a community-based project, designed to improve the lives of a specific community, an objective shared with some of the community arts groups and artists described earlier in this paper. This link is further qualified by Lowe's description of himself as a community artist who bridges the gap between community art and social practice art⁴⁴. This blurring of lines between the genres is not unique to the USA. Groups such as The Drawing Shed⁴⁵ and Creativity Works⁴⁶ in the UK are two examples of traditional community arts practices that according to their publicity firmly align themselves with SPA principles.

⁴¹ Thompson, Nato, *Living as Form* (MIT press 2012) p 27

⁴² Davis, Ben, A Critique of Social Practice Art (International Socialist Review issue 90 July 2013)

⁴³ <http://creativetime.org/summit/2013/10/25/rick-lowe-and-nato-thompson/>

⁴⁴ <http://creativetimereports.org/2013/10/07/rick-lowe-project-row-houses/>

⁴⁵ <http://www.thedrawingshed.org>

⁴⁶ <http://www.creativityworks.org.uk/>

Wochenkläuser and Project Row Houses are two contemporary examples of SPA that blur the lines between art and social work and where the production of an artefact is not the focus of practice objectives. Additionally, their manifestations in terms of artistic value might be considered abstract, controversial and arguably tenuous. However the underlying principles of the use of art to impact positively on the life experience of communities, is firmly aligned with those of the community arts movement.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 looked at the definitions of Community Arts and SPA and in chapter 2, their historical development and influences. From this research it has been demonstrated that there is a correlation in terms of simultaneous development and historical catalyst and clear similarities between Community Art and SPA in respect of artistic and philosophical influences, from Dada to Marx. Characteristics in terms of performance, participatory, relational aesthetics, activism art and dialogical art and the removal of the artist as a focal point are common threads in both the Community Art and SPA case studies in this paper.

However, there is an imbalance in the contemporary discourse, analysis and academic writings, in connection with SPA and Community Arts that sets the two genres apart, in that there is little evidence of this in connection with Community Arts. Conversely, SPA has provided a focus for in-depth critical analysis and academic attention. The analysis of SPA has inadvertently flagged up additional complexity and acknowledged the risks associated with potential gentrification of Community Arts, which has been referred to in chapter 3. However this has also increased the profile for communities in need.

There is a further divergence between the two art forms in relation to the scope and scale of SPA, in terms of intervention. The apparent distancing of some manifestations of SPA from traditional artistic activity, sometimes moving into the territory of social work and questionably filling gaps left by inadequate government policy, has raised questions regarding its artistic validity, exemplified by Wochenklauser and PRH in chapter 3. This de-radicalization of Community Art and SPA is perhaps inevitable in a world where capitalism has largely defeated the challenge of the opposing economic system proposed by Marxists.

In the UK, Margaret Thatcher's confident assertion that 'there is no such thing as society'⁴⁷ and the centre left socialism of New Labour in the 1990s, as described earlier in this paper by Kester, are examples of the zeitgeist that continues to have an impact on Community Art and SPA today, in terms of reduced, limited and controlled funding.

The reduced funding and controls leave both Community Art and SPA with a common vulnerability to non-sustainability and exploitation by the state to fill gaps created by deficiencies in social provision. This is further acknowledged by Claire Bishop, in her essay 'Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?' where Bishop warned of a cautionary tale for today's artists, referring to the demise of the Community Arts movement in the 1980's when it became 'a harmless branch of the welfare state, the kindly folk who can be relied to mop up wherever the government wishes to absolve itself of responsibility'⁴⁸. The writings of Kester, Bishop and the experience of the ACA in the 70's demonstrate the common uncertainty and questionable sustainability of Community Art and SPA in view of their reliance on public funding. Despite this apparent vulnerability, there are artists with a different perspective on the challenges created by restricted funding. Rick Lowe (PRH) buys into the idea of contributing to the 'alternative economy'⁴⁹, working within the established political and financial framework and not fighting against it.

This paper asked the question 'Social Practice Art and Community Art: What are the contrasting characteristics of the two and do these genres fundamentally aim to meet common objectives?' The evidence demonstrated throughout this paper, is that the differences between the two are subtle and that influences, aims and objectives

⁴⁷ <http://briandeer.com/social/thatcher-society.htm>

⁴⁸ Thompson, Nato, *Living as Form, Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*(MIT press 2012)

⁴⁹ <http://creativetime.org/summit/2009/10/24/rick-lowe/>

diverge only in terms of abstraction, scale, professional and academic discourse. The blurred lines between the two genres are exemplified by Rick Lowe's description of himself as cited in chapter 3⁵⁰ of this paper and by Pablo Helguera who writes an exhaustive list of terminology that describes SPA and Community Art activity, indicating that there are a multitude of approaches to art that involve social interaction⁵¹. Manifestations of the two art forms are fluid and multi-disciplinary, with the crossover between the two genres making categorization and definition elusive.

However their aims and objectives are fundamentally the same in terms of the use of art to impact positively on communities, with both currently operating under significantly different socio -political and economic conditions to those that initiated the development of both SPA and Community Art in the 1960's. That said as a result of the non-commodified nature of both Community Art and SPA the challenges facing both in terms of funding and sustainability remain as precarious as ever.

⁵⁰ <http://creativetimereports.org/2013/10/07/rick-lowe-project-row-houses/>

⁵¹ Helguera, Pablo, Education For Socially Engaged Art (Jorge Pinto Books 2011) pp 2-3

Annotated Bibliography

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Braden's book looks at community arts in Britain between 1974 and 1976. Originally commissioned as a study of an artist in residence in school programmes, this broadened into a wider, more in depth analysis of the relationship between the work of artists and people who had not necessarily expected to come into contact with art. The book therefore looks at artists in a range of situations and places, and the relationship between community art and the traditional art world.

2. Crehan, Kate, Community Art. An Anthropological Perspective (Berg 2011)

Crehan refers to the work of Owen Kelly and his 1984 book 'Community Art and the State: Storming the Citadel' in which Kelly states his support for the GLA (Greater London Authority) arts Committee definition of Community Arts, which states that Community Arts, 'Does not refer to any specific activity or group of activities, rather it defines an approach to creative activity, embracing many kinds of events and a wide range of media... Community Arts proposes the use of art to effect social change and affect social policies'

Crehan's book details the development of community arts in the UK and in particular the history of the Free Form arts Trust, looks at the key events, personalities, community arts organisations and their successes and struggles. The book looks at the democratic ideals that support Community Arts, collaboration and inclusiveness and how these have withstood the challenges of internal conflict and competition for funding. The definition above is quoted in the context of the widely considered difficulty in finding a specific set of words to describe community arts, adding that

there has been little or no academic study of community arts in Britain.

3. Coutts, Glenn and Jokela, Timo, International Journal of Education Through Art (Sept 1 2012 special community arts issue)

In this essay, Coutts and Jokela, define community art as

'A form of education through art, It is also an area of artistic and educational practice that tends to take place in settings that one would not normally associate with education. For example, in the streets of towns and cities and in rural, isolated or marginalised communities'

This essay introduces a number of essays where the principle aim is to stimulate thought on the place of community arts and what art education could perhaps learn from community art. In keeping with the context of the essay, in that the publication is an arts education journal, Coutts and Jokela see community arts as an educational tool and the essay and associated articles demonstrate the diversity of the manifestations of community art and its pedagogical use.

4. Art with People, ed. by Malcolm Dickson, Contribution from Sally Morgan. (AN Publications 1988). p18

Sally Morgan describes community art as being different from public art or art in the community because it 'has a long term cultural and political ambition'

In this chapter Morgan briefly looks back over 25 years of community arts in the UK, its ideology, development and the creation and growth of the Association of Community Artists. The chapter helps with further understanding of the elusive definition of community arts

5. Davis Ben. A Critique Of Social Practice Art. (International socialist review issue 90 July 2013)

In this essay Ben Davis challenges some assumptions surrounding social practice art, asks the question is it art? and questions the perceived success of seminal projects. Davis contends that no art can exist within a capitalist structure without that art being given a capitalist articulation. Davis asks if “social practice” art is a starting point for addressing social problems, or a distraction that keeps us from seeing their true extent?

6. Ewell, Maryo, Community Arts a Little Historical Context. (Grantmaker in The Arts (GIA), Vol 22, no. 2 Summer 2011)

'Community Art is of and by the people of a place and culture, often facilitated by a professional artist. It reflects the values, concerns and meaning of living in that place or culture'

In this essay Ewell briefly chronicles key events from the early 1900s to the sixties that helped shape and define community arts in the USA, celebrating past achievements whilst also looking to the future.

7. Helguera, Pablo, Education For Socially Engaged Art (Jorge Pinto Books 2011) pp 1-5

Helguera recognizes that a simple definition of social practice art or socially engaged art is elusive as a result of its many labels and manifestations. Acknowledging the complex relationships between, collaborative, activist, dialogic and participatory art, Helguera concludes that the term ‘socially engaged art’ best defines the collective

genres and uses this as a platform to deconstruct and provide a tool to navigate through the elements that define socially engaged practice.

8. Kelly, Owen, Community Art and the State: Storming the Citadel (Comedia Publishing Group 1984)

Kelly looks at the history of community art in the UK and how this was given energy by the multitude of world political issues of the late sixties and the growing 'freedoms' in western society. Kelly looks at the disparate artist groups and individual practitioners, the struggles of the Association of community Artists, the relationship between community art and the state and how community art risks conforming in order to exist in a state structure. Kelly defines the role of the state, how the state impacts on community art ideals and what is required for community arts to expand and survive.

9. Kester, Grant H, Conversation Pieces (University of California Press 2004) pp 17-25

Kester looks at aesthetics and the assumption that "a work of art should challenge the viewer's expectations about a given image, object or system of meaning" Kester traces the development of this view from the early twentieth century until the 1970s using two contemporary examples of dialogical and avant-garde works to examine how and why the two had a different aesthetic impact and response from viewers.

10. Van Erven, Eugene, Community Arts Dialogues (Treaty of Utrecht 2013) ch. 2.

In this book Van Erven documents some community arts projects in his native

Holland but with examples from across the world. Chapter 2 shows how movements have influenced each other and how ideas can become international, detailing the development of Bread and Puppets, a performance art group whose founder originates from Poland but resides in the USA. Bread and Puppets developed from a Tradition that started in Central Europe in the fifties. The group utilises non-verbal communication as part of performance and distributes bread, symbolising basic human need, the same as theatre they argue. Performances from the sixties were overtly political and influenced by events such as the Vietnam War and Van Ervan states that this group directly influenced 2 other groups in different parts of the world. Welfare State International from the USA and Dogtroep from Holland, using performance art, music and visual arts as tools.

11. Bourriaud, Nicolas, Relational Aesthetics (Les Presses Du Reel 1998) pp 7-40

In this book Bourriaud explores approaches to contemporary art and the relationship between art, artists and those observing or viewing. Bourriaud looks at the origins of works and manifestations referred to as relational aesthetics (a term he coined) and socially engaged and links to surrealism and the Dada movement. Bourriaud looks at the changing relevance of art against a growth in cities and urbanization and how this impacted on the level and variety of social interaction. The book analyses a number of works to examine the motivations and methods of artists, looking at concepts of participation, collaboration and dialogue.

12. Participation, ed. by Claire Bishop, (MIT Press/Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art 2006) pp10-17

This book, edited by Claire Bishop, is comprised of essays by writers including,

amongst others, Umberto Eco and Bertolt Brecht, with contributions from artists such as Joseph Beuys, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Rirkrit Tiravanija. The book looks at the theory behind constructed situations and participation. In her introduction, Bishop provides some historical context, plotting influences and developments from the 1920's to present day.

13. Lowe, Rick and Thompson, Nato, *Creative Time Summit* (Nov 13, 2013)

<http://youtu.be/loloNoVKDXE>

In this discussion, Rick Lowe, Founder of Project Row Houses, and Nato Thompson, Chief Curator, Creative Time, explore issues of race and place, gentrification, and social practice. The discussion also looks at crossovers between social practice and community art and asks if the success of social practice art is preventing the community arts community from accessing limited available funding.

14. Community Arts Workbook ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL (Copyright ' 1998)

This is a workbook for artists, communities and the public or for anyone engaged in or interested in the delivery of community arts projects. The workbook suggests a specific structure and approach to community arts projects and gives some historical context and definition.

15. Suzanne Lacy, 'Silver Action' - 15 February 2013

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/suzanne-lacy-silver-action>

Lacy invited hundreds of older women to join together, recall and celebrate the part they played in important protest/activist events from the late sixties such as Greenham Common Peace Camp and Miss World demonstrations. Women inserted their histories on a timeline on the wall, their first moment of revelation, something

that prompted them to activism and something they noticed early on. The event constituted a day long, public, participatory performance.

16. Dewhurst, Marit, Social Justice Art a Framework for Activist Art Pedagogy (Harvard Educational Press 2014) pp 9-15

This book provides a useful reference and guidance for education professionals and practitioners and for research purposes. The book analyses the theory of pedagogy through art and articulates its aim to allow young people to see themselves as part of the world and able to influence events around them.

17. Chayka, Kyle, WTF is... Relational Aesthetics? (Hyperallergic February 8, 2011)

In this article Chayka take a wry and perhaps cynical view on relational aesthetics, arguing that many representations of this form of art overshadow the important issues that are intended to be the purpose of the work, with the curator taking on celebrity status.

18. Suzanne Lacy 'In Mourning and In Rage'. Media/Visual performance at LA City Hall, December 13, 1977,

<http://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/worksofart/in-mourning-and-in-rage-media-performance-at-los-angeles-city-hall/#sthash.9ZTnkDUb.dpuf>

This video footage records an orchestrated protest performance at the Los Angeles City Hall. This piece by Lacy is a demonstration against what was considered a poor media coverage of the crimes of the Hillside Strangler, a serial killer who targeted women. The hard-hitting performance drew attention to a range of women's rights and equalities issues.

19. Suzanne Lacy Video: Art of Protest (Getty Centre Archive)

<http://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/archives/v63/>

In this video interview Lacy discusses the connection between art and activism, looking at the origins of protest art culture from the mid to late sixties. Activism inspired by the Vietnam war, Black Panther Movement, peace movement and emergence of the feminist movement.

20. Living as form, Socially Engaged Art From 1991-2011, ed. By Nato Thompson (MIT Press 2012)

Thompson's book is a collection of essays that trace and describe the increasing number of art works aimed at impacting on social interaction over a decade from the early nineties. The works described are either collective or from a community context. The works all in some shape or form have participation, dialogical, and activist aspirations and are diverse in their manifestation, from theatre to activism, urban planning and to health care. The artworks described often blur the line between art and the realities of life. Thompson's book helps to categorise an elusive art form and shift in art practice that is the subject of significant contemporary discourse.

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[Fig. 8] Photograph of PRH before renovation. January 1993. Courtesy of PRH

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