

When Audience and Artist Become the Artwork

Participation as the vital tissue for art in the everyday context.

<http://www.momentarium.org/research/artlife.pdf>

Markuz Wernli Saito, November 30, 2005

[1] [Introduction: How did I arrive to this topic and what is my motivation]

From studio to situation¹ – art which gets out of the box



overARCH (Out-of-Place), Kyoto 2003
Markuz Wernli Saito

As a documentary photographer I create mere representations of found environments. Beyond the rich fabric of details, signs and symbolism, I increasingly aspire to reproduce the immaterial quality of a moment in public and private. No matter how lateral my efforts, the resulting images remain the single view I impose on others. The capturing of reality tends to separate oneself – the photographer and viewer alike – from the photographed. The linear

process of framing, display and perception is a moderated one and undermines the immediate experience represented. This often contradicts my intention to instill a sense for the moment in the audience. This is an effort to explore how art intertwined in daily life becomes more pluralistic and connected to situation and environment, fostering a consciousness beyond the individual.

Tracing the fabrics of life in art-making

Looking at the artistic articulations in the last few decades – commercially or not – I see a gravitation towards the singular object, media, or technology. This monolithic approach stems from cultural ideologies, which advocate practicality and commodification in all aspects of life. Art is often seen as a collection of isolated appearances rather than an open language for relationships. Institutional art by its nature tends to be removed from the direct context of reality, often endorsed by a system of celebrities. In our 'age of fear and money'² Not only as an artist I find myself at odds with an increasing polarization and segregation in our society.

¹ Doherty, Claire. 2005. Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation [book title], Black Dog Publishing.

² John Thackara, Talk host of the panel discussion "Designers in the Age of Fear" at the Experimental Design 2005, Bienal de Lisboa, 23 October 2005, http://www.livelanguage.org/mp3/Experimenta_Architecture.mp3

Disconnections in our lives are manifested in a *presence of absence* of our built urban environment, which often consists of unrelated solutions imposed by planners and commercial imperatives. We live in a world, where friction and local differences are more and more leveled or erased. This conformity leaves individuals with a feel of lost control and with an erosion of local identities. Thus, follows a growing disengagement and sterility in the public, which is concerning.

It is worthwhile to look closer at the difference between representation and actual experience and envision an encompassing approach to art which plays straight into our lives. Letting go of common institutional and personal expectations and rediscovering the pure vitality of non-linear communication holds up the old promise of art that expands our grasp on existence and humanity. Setting out the creative process outdoors, weaves the artist and the public straight into the tissues of life on a very basic level. It can make us part of a place and breach personal with social consciousness.

The question for me is not so much what or when it is art since that usually separates it from the context of reality in an already compartmentalized world. But how can the built environment and the interfaces between our lives become more permeable and receptive for transformation by their audience. Public places like life itself are full of contradictions. Rather than focusing on single issues it is increasingly important to me to understand the story and the unfolding narrative, which is linking things and creating new insights. An artist who is not only in touch with herself but the surroundings can make art an integrated and radiating part of life.

Inspiration comes recently from citizen groups and activists, embracing the emergent, unpredictable character of the outside world by planting what I call '*seeds of connection*' more commonly referred to as memes.³ Interesting samples are Flashmob⁴ (the sudden gathering of people in a crowd that do something unusual for a few minutes in unison and then disperse), Vito Acconci's "*Acts of Architecture*"⁵ prompting the visitor's direct physical interaction, or treasure-hunt-like initiatives like BookCrossing⁶, are part of a

³ [Greek: mneme = 'memory'] Any piece of information passed from one mind to another, consisting of a self-replicating and -propagating unit (language as virus), which can become in the example of Web blogs a vehicle for 'cultural transmission' (Richard Dawkins, 1976) and potentially be useful to explain human behavior.

⁴ Flash Mobs are sudden, enacted gatherings of people that do something unusual (e.g. bag jumping on a public square) for a few minutes in unison and then disperse. These events are usually run by individuals, who maintain local online groups, and notify their registered users via cell phone messages. <http://www.flashmob.co.uk/>

⁵ Vito Acconci began in 1980 designing sculptures patterned after architectural forms where viewer interaction is essential. For example a series of "self-erecting architectural units," which requires participants to "complete" them; and outdoor projects that become part of the world around them.

⁶ BookCrossing is a community initiative, which encourages readers to register their used books before leaving them behind on a public place for others to find. Every registered book

strengthening current, which carries collaborative, situational and communal elements into our institutionalized environments.



Flash Mob, London 2003
"Gather here and bag your head"



Insel in der Mur, Graz 2003
Vito Acconci

Irish artist and art critic Brian Hand attests that "community arts continue to further, in an increasingly extreme society, the politics of creativity and aesthetic production as a right not a privilege, and they correctly argue that culture is a collective experience."⁷ Art, which migrates *from studio to situation*⁸ has the potential to counter the tendencies of conformity and loss of meaning in everyday life by directly engaging the uninvited, unassuming audience. Rather than imposing the artist's single-framed view on the world I recently embrace an openly structured process where there is space for learning and blurring or shifting roles between artist and audience. I feel encouraged to employ the random and the audience in my undertakings rather than a script. That way I let things happen. To rely on chance and the surroundings (including the audience) puts me in the role of a facilitator and experimenter. I overcome the isolation of the sole creator and I get into the opposing poles of detachment and connection. When working *with* rather than *for* the public the antipodes of chance and control become evident. Especially the participatory element of the audience opens avenues into surprise, play, and the unanticipated which are vital ingredients for grounding us with the moment, places and ourselves.

This emergent art, fully involved in the context of everyday life reaches beyond a single person's perspective and consciousness, and explores the dialectic of who we are as an individual and as a public body. Allan Kaprow, known as the father of Happenings and Performance Art, distinguishes institutionalized 'artlike art' which is secluded from reality, from 'lifelike art' which is inseparable from real life. He emphasizes its nature of

has a tracking code, which gives online access to its reader's history, reviews and comments.
<http://www.bookcrossing.com/>

⁷ Hand, Brian. 2000. The Audience as Producers, CIRCA Art Magazine no. 94, p. 32.

⁸ 2. Doherty.

communication: "Lifelike art's message is sent on a feedback loop: from artist to us and around again to the artist. (...) 'conversation' is the very means of lifelike art, which is always changing".⁹ Today's discussion on augmented reality¹⁰ makes us believe that immersive communication technologies will help us face the pressing challenges. Kaprow states that "... all of the integrative roles lifelike art can play (...) none is so crucial to our survival as the one that serves self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is where you start on the way to becoming 'the whole', weather this process takes the form of social action or potential transformation".¹¹

At the core for a more integrated, life-centered understanding of art, is the fluid relationship between audience and artist. With this in mind I was looking how different artists put themselves in disposition to their audience.

[2] [Development: how does this topic inform my work and inspire new ideas]

Changing notions of audience

"Audiences are ignored because many see the primacy of meaning and pleasure in the artwork as residing in a supposed unmediated understanding of the specific work or in the artist's intention".¹² Nick Zangwill's statement extends to Brian Hand's notion of audience, which is a "conventional sanctuary of an invisible presence... there is often the fear of fluid concepts like audiences. There is a desire for pragmatic certainties that will control the situational logic of reception once and for all." ⁶ Hand suggests in his essay *The Audience as Producers* to turn the focus from the artist-centred paradigm to the dynamics of audiencehood, arguing for the need of comprehensive arts-audience studies: "Now, at a point of near exhaustion of new forms of resistance through art there is perhaps a greater need to look at the dominant discursive formations which give rise to the communities of interpretation and the intended, the imaginary, the actual, the posthumous and the excluded audiences and their productive capacities."¹³

How we position art in the world and in our lives frames the definition of audience: "The fine arts traditionally demand for their appreciation physically passive observers... but active art requires that creation and realization,

⁹ Kaprow, Allan. 2003. *Essays in the Blurring of Art and Life*. p. 204. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁰ Augmented reality (AR) is a field of computer research, which deals with the combination of real world and computer generated data. At present, most AR research is concerned with the use of live video imagery which is digitally processed and "augmented" by the addition of computer generated elements like motion tracking data, leading into the construction of controlled environments.

¹¹ 2. Kaprow, p. 217.

¹² Zangwill, Nick. 1999. *Art and Audience*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57:3, p. 316.

¹³ 2. Hand, p. 34.

artwork and appreciator, artwork and life be inseparable"¹⁴. The audience as fully integral part of art adds complexity not many public artists want to work with. The question is in what stage and to what degree in art-making is the audience included. In the following pages let's look at six very different artists and how they work in public with this participatory and collaborative element of the audience.

Disposition of community and location

You arrive at Sacramento (California) Airport at Terminal A. Finally. Your incoming flight from Hawaii was late and dull. As you rush over the



***The Flying Carpet, Sacramento Airport
Seyed Alavi***

pedestrian bridge to the parking garage in your gloomy mood an unanticipated smile strikes your face. You are welcomed by a 50-meter stretch of aerial view on the Sacramento River, which is woven into the wall to wall carpet. Is a moment of flight frozen in mid air? Your legs loose suddenly their tired weight and tap dancingly over 50 miles of meandering landscape. As you nod in amusement to fellow passengers you are reminded of the magic of flying. Then you learn that this work is named 'The Flying Carpet' realized by Seyed Alavi.

Iran-born Seyed Alavi is based in Oakland, California and realizes site-specific installations in everyday places. He sees public art as a complex phenomenon, which is informed by its immediate context. Alavi compares working in the public with invading the house of ones neighbor: the artist crosses a threshold when setting out art not everybody is able to appreciate. Despite sporadic rejections among his audience Alavi believes in public art: "It takes us into the present by infusing spirit into the context we live in. I am looking up to historical Japan, where the arts permeated every aspect of life. Meticulous articulations of living were done universally with purpose and made the moment more meaningful. Western language has gradually removed and separated art from life. Especially here in the United States we gravitate on mass production and if you wake up in suburban America everything is just 'bla'. The notion of beauty has been trashed. The making of everyday life into art is indispensable because I read into the term of fine art the process of refining, and bringing out the essence or whatever makes our lives worth living."¹⁵

¹⁴ 3. Kaprow, p. 64.

¹⁵ Alavi, Seyed. September 15, 2005. Telephone interview, San Francisco/Oakland.

"In practice many variables inform my process of working with the public. We should strive to avoid the framing of art and turn it into something more universally integrated. The reality is that art is put on the market, there are expectations and it becomes easily a commodity. But at the end of the day we should strive for the purity of the situation and highlight the very instant we live in."¹⁶

Alavi's relationship to the audience is fairly linear and rooted in civil responsibility. "I have no intention to confront people or make them feel uncomfortable. Before going into a project I try to understand the archetypical fabric of the specific location and context. Every installation goes through a reflective process of learning from the community. I question everything I do but I can hear only few voices. To the best of my knowledge I form a vision, which I implement in my work. It is difficult to extract the audience as a factor in making art. Art has the potential to be celebration of life, where the reality of the tangible world is intertwined with the momentum of the airy and contextual."¹⁷

Civil enactments instill and inspire



Citizen's input determines the artist's urban mapping project



**underLINE, Kyoto 2004
Grady Gerbracht, Claudia Vieira**

You signed up for a one-month workshop at your local art center to do a workshop named 'underLINE' with guest artist Grady Gerbracht along with 20 other participants. Then you are asked to identify and explain locations in the city, which are of personal importance to you. The goal is to put all the participant's landmarks on a map and to direct the foreign artist around town. Together as a group you work out 30 journeys, one per day, for Grady to explore and record with a video camera and special microphones mounted on his bicycle. Towards the end of the month you witness how Grady is creating a topology with a multi-channel audio and video environment in the

¹⁶ 2. Alavi.

¹⁷ 3. Alavi.

art center that overlaps his urban experiences with those of yourself as a local resident. Chance recordings of fleeting moments connecting the locations, together with projections drawing in time and space with linear segments borrowed from the streets which create a collective experience where you rediscover your city and personal landmarks in a whole new way.

Grady Gerbracht is based in Brooklyn and does process-oriented installations in and outside of galleries. His inventive installations are drawn from life and re-inhabit and re-invent the spaces of daily life. They offer experiences to re-evaluate relationships to elusive social, cultural and institutional regimes, and among individuals involved. Some of Grady's projects are of emergent character and include on-the-spot collaboration with the audience.

"Originally I was manipulating the audience by means of size, illusion and perspective in my artwork. I was interested in the evolutionary aspect of the hung painting, which becomes three-dimensional, turns into a full space and the viewer becomes part of it. If you push the idea further you breach into the public domain. The participatory aspect of the audience became increasingly important to me since I am interested in context- and not site-specific art. Some of my projects have communication built into an open-ended structure. As an artist I set a conceptual framework and guide through the process which outcome is in the hands of the participants."

"I like the idea of making the audience do something. Often I use visuals to make the audience 'perform'. I use myself as an example in the public realm where the body stands in for people to relate to. My role as an artist is to become the embodiment of a person, a citizen, a metaphor. There is no need for the public to buy tickets in order to participate here. Onstage theater or spectacle has usually a certain pretense, whereas I try to relate to a place and its momentum. It is not like I am delivering art to you, but I would like for the individual to see another citizen taking action. This in turn can encourage people to be creative on their own. The public domain offers more vital diversity than a museum or gallery, which are restricted with presumptions and represent only certain sections of society. Public art can potentially be democratic."¹⁸

"To connect to the audience in the public I sometimes utilize the quasi-spectacle to attract attention: with the right intention it can provoke something purposeful. These enactments of public gestures, is a somewhat detached process, like a grenade, which triggers thinking later. The ephemeral character of art (and life for that matter) is fascinating to me. Look at the World Trade Center, which was a rather ugly, questionable compound. But as soon as it is no longer there it becomes something important and to be remembered. I would like to do something like that on a

¹⁸ Gerbracht, Grady. September 15, 2005. Telephone interview, San Francisco/Brooklyn.

personal level, where people start asking questions after encountering one of my installations.”¹⁹

Movies derived from the confluence of street and life



*Doei** Taoist Movies, Kyoto 2004~, Alessandro Mavilio
The grip as quasi-spectacle for full immersion in the public *) street image

It's a beautiful summer morning. You sit in your balcony on the second floor that faces a small neighborhood street in the dense city you live. Suddenly a camera on a crane come into view above the edge of the newspaper you're reading. As you peek down to the ground floor you see a guy holding the grip over his shoulders slowly walking down the street. The same guy who came by here a bit earlier by bicycle. Is he doing Tai Chi or maybe filming birds in the trees? However, the camera guy is clearly fully immersed in the moment as he toggles the attention between his camera frame and surroundings. You could have just left it at this but curiosity takes over and you confront him. You learn that the camera guy is Alessandro Mavilio and does what he calls 'Taoist' movies. When you check the film clips on Alessandro's website you are fascinated what powerful narratives can unfold from footage captured straight from the flow of life.

Alessandro Mavilio is an Italian video artist located in Kyoto, Japan. He collects footage from street scenes in the unassuming public. The situational audience provides the raw material for Mavilio's film editing. Connecting on different levels to the public helps Mavilio to develop a sensibility for underlying realities, which he weaves into narrative threads of his emergent plots which he calls 'Taoist Movies'.

“With 'Taoist' I refer to the language of emptiness, which embraces the flow and ambivalence of the moment and meaning. I like to walk the open streets and film reality as I find it, where life is my scriptwriter. I want people to get acquainted to me, and the camera. That makes me part of the scene and I slip inside the moment. Using the approach of Candid Camera feels like an act of stealing. Making 'Taoist' movies is like filming animals in the wild. I

¹⁹ 2. Gerbracht.

have to introduce myself, and the camera to the situation in a very subtle way: through waiting, assimilating, and observing."²⁰

"I use very bulky equipment like cranes and rails, so everybody can see me right away. It is like this performance gives me reason and grounding to be in that scene. I rather establish an open and honest connection with the people surrounding me. People never assume that they would be worthy to be filmed with all that gear. Apparently my audience finds their own explanations for my presence. People observe me and put me in the place where it seems right to them. Since I participate fully in life while filming I walk on a fine line: I am witness, performer, and influencer in one."²¹

"Making the flux of life into a documentary entails film editing. Besides weeding out and shortening my footage, I keep the sequences chronological to sustain the original progression. I want to lead the protagonists in my movies gradually into the ultimate culmination and out if it. The editing is an intimate process, where the protagonists seem to talk. Since I was in that very moment I am able to easily reconnect to them. Sometimes I am getting so involved that I cry or fall for the people in my footage. In this context I write subtitles and dialogues respectful to the cast, introducing a plot or narrative to the movie."²²

Inviting the audience to transcend the mundane



The artist accompanies participants home from Grand Central Station



**The Long Way Home, NYC 2004
San Keller**

Through a friend you heard about a not-to-be-missed 'action' going on in your town by Swiss artist San Keller, which takes place on the last Friday night of every month. Meeting place is the central train station that is anyway on your daily commute, and as you get there you recognize what must be the artist with a big sign announcing 'The Long Way Home'. About 30 people are herded around him. Together you manage to decide on a route

²⁰ Mavilio, Alessandro. November 2, 2005. Interview in Kyoto, Japan.

²¹ 2. Mavilio

²² 3. Mavilio.

for how you all want to be 'taken home' by the artist. Finally you troop out of the station, after a long walk and get to the first place, a small apartment. Later, apartments will increase in size relative to how few people there are to fill them. Crammed you stand or sit and make light and munch finger food together. Then you head downstairs and continue to the next home. You keep on walking the whole night – your home happens to be on the bottom of the list... After three hours you don't feel the feet anymore but your heart is filled from a cold winter night shared in a group and with unanticipated conversations, little revelations, and visiting many homes. Amused about neglecting codes of normal conduct, you write a report of your experiences to the artist in the days to follow.

San Keller is a conceptual action and performance artist from Switzerland based in Zurich. He is 'hosting' audience-related projects, which often employ elements of narratives, irony, ritual and patience. The relationship between artist, work and audience are essential, and take place in public or institutions. It is interesting to see how Keller relates to the audience and embeds action and individuals in almost poetic anecdotes: People can sign a contract with Keller, which commits them for life to dance whenever they hear a specific piece of music...

"In most of my actions I relate to the participants in the positive and negative. In this very connection I see the great advantage of action art. Even though I usually realize stand-alone projects I don't really like concluded projects. My relationship to art and society is an inquiring one. This keeps things open-ended. I have questions and look for answers by the participants. Usually I've got a concept, which precedes an action. This provides the project and its participants with a frame. It permits different leeway from action to action. It is on the audience to decide if they want to participate or not. In case nobody partakes the concept remains a concept, or the action leaves me the option to realize it on my own. The audience is not able to change the action's parameters. But its reactions can inspire me to new concepts."²³

"I am looking for the exemplarily behavior – also on a small scale. If I give my projects a framework with a certain understatement I create the basis for frictions and altering tension. There are actions where I am first the initiator and eventually a participant. There is a good sample within my series '*Winter Help*' where I did an action named '*The Long Way Home*'. Through flyers I invited people to meet one night a month at Great Central Station from where we would walk everybody home one person at a time. It was a great experience in dynamics of leadership. Usually we would stop by at the participant's homes before moving on. What started out as a small group engaged up to 30 commuters. Some of my actions are more staged and theatrical, like '*Bedtime Stories*': In a gallery is a bed with chairs around it. While I am lie in bed people are telling me good night stories until I fall

²³ Keller, San Stefan. October 17, 2005. Telephone interview, Kyoto/Zurich.

asleep...²⁴

"My participants are usually voluntary and consent. I work in form of an offer, which is grounded in our society's principle of choice. Provocation and overwhelming people doesn't interest me but the voluntary enrollment. To work with the poetic element in my concepts allows me to create situations where there is space for participation and momentum. My work is about enabling experience and intensifying the moment. I am interested in the fundamentally existential level of being. The act of the ritual and its aspect of reiteration can make sense like in the action San Keller Sleeps at Your Workplace. We created a special situation on an ongoing basis. At the core of my actions is the idea. I don't use the term art, because it evokes a cliché and becomes more of an obstacle. I strive to have people partake in an idea, which triggers incitement and awareness on a deeper level. Some people might see it as a mere experience, some might call it art. I work within and outside of traditional art institutions. I see myself as a part of the art establishment, which I reframe to my own purpose."²⁵

Reframing reality and audience in the experiment



Life/Theater, New York 2005, Lee Walton
Appointed actors and audience in everyday locations

The postcards from your local gallery announced The Experiential Project, which consists of a series called Life/Theater Performances that take place over three weeks on Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 4-5 p.m. You enter the street level art space with storefront windows where other visitors sat already down to view what takes place outside. Now you do know that some of the activities on the frontside streets and sidewalks during this designated hour, have been orchestrated by experimentator Lee Walton. But you don't know which. Is this woman in blue business suit who carries an ironing board and repositioning her shoe for real? Hey, the very same bike messenger was stopping and breathing heavily already 20 minutes ago... What the heck is going on? It's about time for you to get back out to that public realm of

²⁴ 2. Keller,

²⁵ 3. Keller.

concurrent happenings...

Lee Walton is based in New York and experiments with interactions in the outside world. Predominantly with means of performance he reframes everyday patterns and rhythms of contemporary city life. With a recent series called Life/Theater he orchestrates out-of-the ordinary acts in everyday setting: e.g. on a previously announced time and place an actress dressed in business attire shows up in downtown carrying an ironing board and adjusting her heels...

"The defined time in existing locations creates anticipation, sometimes even a hype. Before planning my events I usually get a photograph and a good idea of the place. Then I imagine what could happen within that space. No matter how much I'm trying there is always the element of the unanticipated in the outcome. In my earlier work I would get in a situation, change something and get out of it. Today I set up a situation where people are prompted to interact or not. I believe that a human being cannot make an irrational decision. What appears to outsiders as an irrational act comes from forces deep inside of us, which make us do things in a certain way."²⁶

"Performance is making things happen by revealing the unseen to us. It not only puts us immediately into the situation but helps me lose control over the work and do things by chance. Performance has the potential to change things beyond my imagination, so I can observe and learn more. The same happens in my drawings where I create something I see happen which takes on its own course. Often I am just part of the audience, observing. I like the idea that my performances go their own course and can be potentially carried on through stories and anecdotes of its witnesses. The narrative aspect is great."²⁷

"In The Experimental Project at Art In General I have people sit in the storefront gallery looking out the street. Out front actors enact everyday scenes but repeat the actions over certain intervals. If you can turn the switch as if reality were theater, it is more than entertaining. Through repetition ordinary acts take on whole new meanings. This heightened affinity suddenly turns the huge space of the whole city into focus, maybe just because another person is lighting a cigarette. From that moment an artist becomes part of the audience because I can't predict what's going to happen next."²⁸

Building on cyclical connections with the audience

On your way to work you walk down that all too familiar street. One morning you see a colorful line following a crack in the sidewalk, leading to the other

²⁶ Walton, Lee. October 31, 2005. Telephone interview, Kyoto/Brooklyn.

²⁷ 2. Walton.

²⁸ 3. Walton.

side of the block. At its front end you encounter artist Rebecca Klobucher on her knees rubbing NuPastels into 'A Line'. You are pretty skeptical but a little bit curious when you see her day after day painting like that on the sidewalk. Does this intrusion make any sense? After a few weeks the colored line parts from your normal path. You take this as an invitation for a welcomed detour that brings you in touch with unfamiliar territory and the cultural diversity of your own town. You are glad to finally see the artist again, share some of your cookies and learn more from her experience, and the many stories this growing line entails.



A Line, San Francisco 2003
Rebecca Klobucher

Rebecca Klobucher is a multidisciplinary painter located in Saugatuck, MI, who is stretching common definitions by comprising her work with elements of installations, performance, and public interventions. She enjoys building a reputation among the public where she connects to a place by working and enduring the activity for an extended period of time.

"Art for me is communication. This includes audience and intent, and there is often more than one audience. In San Francisco I drew 'A Line' to connect multi-cultural neighborhoods with a common path, using continuous cracks in the sidewalk. For eight months I worked on my knees rubbing

NuPastels into the cracks of this traveling line. Tourists approached boldly, asking questions and taking pictures. Residents, especially in Chinatown, looked skeptical or curious at first. Over time they approached, some thanking me, offering cookies and sunscreen... One guitar player started meeting me on A Line to help draw. One day, an elderly woman from Little Italy directed traffic while I crossed a street. Children followed A Line from the Powell Street bus stop. Feeling a bit displaced in California, this action made me part of the city's fabric. The stories of the people I met are the art for me. I became the thankful audience."²⁹

"In *A Line*, the effort and process brought me in touch with people I may have otherwise never been in a relationship. Art can be a way to initiate relationships without talking. It is like poetry, which allows space for sharing. The influence of the audience is always an unknown. In case of no response

²⁹ Klobucher, Rebecca. November 7, 2005. Telephone interview, Kyoto/Saugatuck.

and no audience, I would still learn from the experience. The absence of things is not "nothing." Uncertainty is an uncomfortable place for some, but is essential in personal growth. Giving up control is losing ego. Losing ego is essential for personal growth. It makes us have better relationships with others. How do we make art without ego? This sounds cyclical again..."³⁰

Recently I realized instead of living to make better art, I make art and learn how to live better. It is cyclical. While I learn how to live, making art is part of this ongoing journey. If I remain open as an artist, others naturally become an essential part of process and ultimately, I receive more than I can ever give. At the same time, the gallery cannot be denied. It is an institution with meaning. Along with everything else, the gallery is still in need of dialogue. I often wonder if art has much influence. For one project, I asked security guards working in art galleries this question. I thought if anyone is to be changed by art, it would be them as they are exposed to it day after day. The results were, most seemed indifferent to it. However, one woman said a Murakami grew on her after two weeks, while she watched children enjoying the painting. Another man explained that the art in his house were mostly landscapes that reminded him of home. More inquiries yielded side-tracked responses (and reminders of gallery policies). So, while my question remains unanswered, I did add to my collection of great stories."³¹

[3] [Conclusion: Interpretation and application of findings]

Thoughts on participatory art-making in the public

"The conditions and boundaries of audiencehood are [so] inherently unstable and yet discursively do not lack coherence."³²

Despite substantial differences in articulation and techniques, the six artists presented here, share common characteristics. On the one hand all artists understand their role as some sort of mediator between context and individual, while shifting the private and public levels of consciousness. There is usually a distinction to the activist. The artist as a mediator doesn't propagate a defined agenda but rather applies subtle gestures to instill observation, reflection and a sense of connection in the audience.

Let's look at four crucial aspects of experimental art drawn from life and public, for further discussion and inspiration.

Ethics, attitudes and context

Working in the audience in the public domain brings up issues on respect, intention, control and legality.

³⁰ 2. Klobucher.

³¹ 3. Klobucher.

³² 3. Hand, p. 36.

Seyed Alavi's solid installations are based on a profound dialog with the public, dedicated research and the contemplative examination of space and context. He inspires meaning based on carefully formulated intention towards the community. Grady Gerbracht's more ephemeral experiences relate more to activity, in existing everyday systems. These gestures derive from questioning and investigating the reality we live in. Alessandro Mavilio works within the unsuspecting public in an attempt to capture not only fully immersive street life documentations, but his very own perception. Such interventions raise questions about the rights of people involved. Where does seamless adaption to space and moment end, and where does provocation (as in 'guerilla art') and surveillance (as from security cameras) begin? Lee Walton's performance-based work emphasizes the situation, turning the public into a kind of playground for experimental realities. This is admittedly more interventionist but almost a necessity to evoke the unreal in the public.

A more social and spiritual dimension is embedded in Rebecca Klobucher's initiatives. She points out: "Beyond desire, there is responsibility; The responsibility of an artist to society and the responsibility of an individual to herself. I realize much of my art has become site-specific. It is more meaningful in context. Therefore I must learn something of a place and/or people before beginning."³³ San Keller's actions tend to work with borderline experiences on a fundamental level of being. The act of ritual and aspects of reiteration are common in his work, which lends itself to almost shamanic traits. This suggests that the artist needs to be grounded well in herself/himself as well as the surroundings: thorough engagement with inner and outer worlds provides the sensibility and openness to reach out and connect to others.

Levels of relationships

Interactive art in public is not so much about finding an audience, but how to learn from it. Public interaction art tends to lead away from the single, producing artist. At a certain point the differentiation between audience and artist becomes obsolete and irrelevant. Some artists even integrate fully with the unsuspecting, random audience to embrace the element of chance and surprise, whereas others work with an engaged, agreeing, or committing audience where factors of guidance and bonding become relevant. Both approaches make the artist some sort of facilitator where the audience dissolves as such and becomes the co-creator.

Walton's Life/Theater experiments are open to relationships on multiple levels. Leadership is present in the collaboration with actors, the random in relation to the public, and facilitation of an art event in the gallery. Gerbracht uses at times a more workshop-type approach to include citizens in the realization phase of his projects where on-the-spot dialog and ad-hoc

³³ 4. Klobucher.

implementation are key factors. Keller's actions in contrast resonate strongly with the way he reaches out and commits the audience like a host or a Master of Ceremonies³⁴ in the public – usually in a selected group and within a time frame. The artist's protagonist presence is important like his refined concept. He employs the audience and its loyalty, making them the medium of the piece.

Klobucher relates to the public more as a result of a continuum, rather than something prompted. Her art sets a basis for one-on-one encounters and connection on a humanly, egalitarian level, offering entry points at any stage of the process. Here art-making which moves from the studio to the street leads to a cyclic interaction with the public of ongoing giving and taking.

The levels of audience involvement contrast significantly among the different artists work. Mavilio's and Lee's approach is reminiscent to an artist as modern day flaneur and casual provocateur. Their quasi spectacle prompts a universal audience to a shared experience, where interactions and interpretation remain up to the individuals and therefore rather limited and contained. On the other spectrum of audience impact is Keller's approach, which usually revolves directly around the participant's very own life experience and personal connections. Voluntary enrollment and the building of immediate relationships deepens the consciousness as an individual and as a group.

Means of connection

The spectrum of art, which is rooted in everyday life seems to sway between intervention and permeation. No matter what kind of means applied, the power of this experimental art form is the innate experience inherently linked to ones own life and community.

Keller's or Klobucher's work seek the immediate exchange, verbally or not. 'Taoist' movie screening or Life/Theater approach the more subliminal or infiltrated connection. It is up for question what impact more subversive interventions planted in our realities have. In any case it is notable that many artists purposefully avoid the label 'art' for their experiments in order to keep them accessible to everybody. Somehow the word implies 'not real' or 'not pluralistic'.

Elements of framing reality like a script, or carefully calculated roles derive from the artist's intention as seen in Gerbracht's and Alavi's work, allowing more or less participatory influence from the audience. Mavilio and Klobucher leave the course of their projects fairly up to chance beyond the starting point. Keller's work initiates and often sustains unconventional, mostly mental outlets of conversation based on basic acts or routines most people

³⁴ A Master of Ceremonies (MC) is in managing a staged event or other performance. The MC usually presents performers, speaks to the audience, and generally keeps the event moving.

can easily relate to. Klobucher is also interested in stories that multiply in her surroundings but works in the more tangible domain of painting.

Gerbracht's activities use elements of play, experiment, enactment and subtle gestures. The open-structured method "creates a feedback loop which confronts the audience with structures that govern daily life, the roles they play in it, as well as the influence they sustain on our identities"³⁵.

Performance, the quasi-spectacle, or enactments are the most situational form of connection. Walton's *Life/Theater* gives passers-by the option to (subconsciously) drive the course of what's happening. It's like a living story telling where levels of reality in the public start to shift. In Keller's words: "Through performance the artwork originates not only from me but in conjunction with the audience."³⁶ It is notable that the preliminary announcement of a mere everyday act can declare and frame it as a performance.

Alavi's installations are a sample of feasible, at times utilitarian art. The question is, whether everyday objects and facilities can be transformed and orchestrated into carriers of meaning. Memes sustained and carried on by its surroundings. This could lead into guided but intuitive public expressions, which build on 'thoughtless acts'³⁷ of the audience and to explore how we adapt, exploit, and react to things in our environment.

Issues of documentation

Kaprow points to the dilemma of documentation in experimental art: "There is no excerpting and reenacting them [art activities in ordinary life] on a stage, no documenting them for a show. Art thus is easily forgotten. And that is the condition for experimentation: art is the forgetting of art."³⁸ San Keller shows that documentation can be playful and integrated in a concept: "From time to time I do an event called 'San Keller Show' where I put paper-strips on a tree, each with the title of a project. People would pick a strip and I simply talk about that particular action. Here we have a form of narrated documentation, which prompts the theme of transience. Sometimes I do a memory game consisting of relatively small photographs of my works. I guess that I could employ an external cameraman during my actions, but usually I don't do that. Instead the event is in people's memory and lives on in their anecdotes."³⁹ Lee Walton brings the dilemma of documentation to the point: "I think that the picture as a form of documentation is the end of our

³⁵ 3. Gerbracht.

³⁶ 4. Keller.

³⁷ Fulton Suri, Jane, 2005, *Thoughtless Acts* [book title], Chronicle Books, San Francisco.

³⁸ 4. Kaprow, p. 249.

³⁹ 5. Keller.

imagination. If you videotape your project it inevitably turns into a video clip and is subjected to it."⁴⁰

[4] [Connecting Research to Artwork]

Reorientation and implications for future projects



The Lost Wallet (Out-of-Place) SF 2005
Markuz Wernli Saito



The Lost Wallet (Out-of-Place) SF 2005
Markuz Wernli Saito

As a novice to lifelike public art I was realistic enough not to label my project as 'artwork', but modestly use 'study' instead. Dropping a fat wallet on the street in front of a static video camera, while confronting passers-by with a situational dilemma was a practical choice during my nomadic summer months. The one-man-show needed minimal, highly mobile equipment, and the setup was location-independent and worked with a self-contained documentation. If I learnt one thing through conversing with other artists, it is that effective lifelike art is everything but an instant affair. This paper bears witness of a personal introspection, which just started and will continue.

Important differentiation

Regarding methodologies it is notable that the six artists mentioned above fall into two distinct groups. One could be seen as the experimenting and intervening artists who use enactments or interventions to play, to tease, maybe to prompt a reaction. It's usually an open-ended process of setting something out and see what happens. The other group of artists works from a defined intention, a basic intuitive need, which leads into a communication strategy before they venture outside. Everything evolves around the quality and sustainability of relationships. This exposes that my current study is based on a fairly superficial approach and misses valuable opportunities to really connect to participants and the behavioral fabric behind urban

⁴⁰ 4. Walton.

surfaces. How does lifelike art attain this convincing “inner strength” as shown in some of the samples above?

Ascertain my proposition

In my baby steps as lifelike artist I reduced and disguised my personal intervention to the bare minimum in order to create what I call an “environmentally centered” situation, as opposed to an artist-centered approach. In the discourse with other artists I realized how that truncated my level of interaction with the audience in my current ‘studies’, when in fact connecting to audience and environment was at the core of my motivation. In a misguided attempt to re-create authenticity, I got caught up eliminating the interdependence between my presence, the artifact and real-time documentation.

Working with any sort of covert performance or pretentious documentation, has always a taste of augmentation and the tendency to defeat the momentum and chemistry of the situation – the very ingredients needed to connect and interact. Interventions with low profile (unnoticeable for the public radar) so as not to compromise real life occurrences made the fairly uncontrollable factors like audience, randomness, and documentation working against me. Instead I much prefer to employ the audience and public as my allies. Currently I am remodelling my role from an intruder to some sort of a ‘public host’, ‘collaboration architect’, or ‘communication incubator’, who grows his projects in consideration of the personal and public implications, weaving closer ties to participants and institutional public, while introducing intuitive objectives which remain tangible to the audience.

What’s the point of lifelike public art?

I had to remind myself what makes public interaction art different from the random, the spectacle, or the ad campaign. It is the potential of subtly shifting our paradigms that govern personal codes of behavior and public systems we live and ‘operate’ in. My digression from commercial art has its roots in scrutinizing our paradigms, which clearly disintegrate the basics on which life depends – what seems already beyond repair. With this in mind, connecting to and collaborating with audiences in the urban public takes on a highly relevant meaning and entails responsibilities. Looking closely at social and personal issues will therefore inform the direction and purpose of my oncoming projects. To make these communication projects egalitarian and accessible it is wise to stay distant from any segregating notions of politics and art.

Slow growth from inside out

The instantaneous approach doesn’t seem to persist in building relationships on individual and institutional level. Public, interactive art projects with deeper implications build up over time, often with conceptual frames, and

through meticulous reiteration from smaller to larger scale. The conceptually working artists in this report show how important detailed planning is, incorporating aspects of event management and yes, also from marketing and public relations (PR). Maybe inspiration awaits us from the commercial front if we can transcend a *market analysis* into 'insights on the social condition', and a product campaign into 'authentic cyclical connections'? Keeping things in local and cultural context and following sound intentions helps to bring out the best of individuals, environment and resources.

Building bridges and a fabric of inter-dependence

By gaining a wider support for my local projects and connecting on different levels of our society there is a potential for small, but visionary transformations, where:

- The individual becomes participant
- The artist is the host or master of ceremony
- Galleries turn into communication labs
- Authorities become approachable and integrated
- The public becomes enabled

In the fabric of inter-dependence my documentation issues will be elegantly resolved and no longer the interfering burden. Exposing a project idea to a more or less public process is already a documentary in itself where participants become the delegates or ambassadors. The six months to follow will be my testing ground for the inception and implementation of a conceptual communication project routed in the daily routine. In order to better facilitate my PR and networking needs and to proceed this vital discussion I am currently working on a dedicated blog-enabled online platform (partially in Japanese).

Afterword

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