

Being in Service: Art Practice Towards Empathy

Markuz Wernli Saitô, Kyoto, December 12, 2006

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

We live in a complex world of abstract entities and obscure developments, where we often forget that our reality is made of individual persons and their relations to one another and the world. The forward-looking thinker Theodore Zeldin observes this deficit in present-day human co-existence as follows: "*We know a lot about the material world but we don't really know who inhabits this planet. That to me is the big agenda of the 21st century*".¹ This calls on the *art world* to return to its primary function, which is to *bring out what is absent or missing* in our daily lives. Zeldin's observation suggests that art ought to find ways to make empathy and understanding tangible, inspiring and exciting on a person-to-person level. Therefore, truly relevant and responsible art practice is facing the urgent issues of our times by working from within the fabric of life, outside authoritarian, commodified and elitist modes of dialog.²

What is service about?

Service is as old as human kind. In its original sense to be *in service* is an ethical obligation for every sustainable life and art practice, most intimately conveyed by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, a researcher of wholistic healing: "*When you help, you see life as weak; when you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as a whole.*"³

When I help somebody I am aware of my own advantage. But when I serve I am not in a position of strength because we serve with the whole of ourselves. To be *in service* means, that we employ all our experiences and creativity. This wholeness in us serves the wholeness in others. Therefore, service in its primary humanistic sense is a relationship between equals poignantly described by Dr. Remen: "*We can serve only that to which we are profoundly connected, that which we are willing to touch.*"⁴

To encourage civility and civic responsibility individuals need to get involved in taking action that makes a difference to others. This way, humans are *a part of the solution* rather than passive observers. This creates a unity of one's sense of self, the sensibility for connectedness to others, and the meaning that derives from contributing to something larger than oneself. Pedagogue Sheldon Berman is convinced that empathy and service are the bridges to community, which provide continuity, depth and meaningfulness stretching into a civility that

¹ Zeldin, Theodore, 2003. Conversation About Work. Talk recorded on July 1st, 2003 within the *Camera at Work* series of Tate Modern in London (transcript by Markuz Wernli Saito) <http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/zeldin.htm>

² Krznaric, Roman, 2004. Empathy and Contemporary Art. Oxford, self-published essay. <http://tinyurl.com/y2wq38>

³ Remen, Rachel Naomi, 1991. In *The Service of Life*. Noetic Science Review.

⁴ 2. Remen

enriches us all.⁵

In most of the so called 'developed world' service has been widely adopted in the realm of work in order to substantiate and replace means of production that optimize profit (wealth) or gain (power). Service therefore is defined as a transforming, *supposedly* mutually beneficial process, ideally through the direct engagement of everybody involved. But while this *service labor* demands more and more creativity and relational skills from each worker as well as consumer (or "pro-sumer"), our organizational structure in most of society remained unchanged and rigid since the 19th century. We are serving on some behalf imposed on us that is usually beyond our reach. Theodore Zeldin is very articulate about it: "*Work is organized on an inherited military tradition which says that there is a big man who leads you to battle and that we will beat up the enemy [...] – the commercial opposition. Every person has a line officer and a subordinate and this is really taken over from the military.*"⁶

In order to meet the ever-growing and unprecedented challenges of our times, we need to unleash the full potential of all individual human creativity by profoundly reorganize our relations to life and the world.⁷ Art needs to help shape a renewed awareness where we serve and trust the wholeness of life because we are fully in touch with it. In times of apparent *permanent crisis* there is a need to reconnect with the overall state of social order as indicated by Zeldin: "*It is surprising how deep the degree of uncertainty is among those who govern us ... They would like to do something differently but they don't know how. It is the absence of an alternative model, which keeps them stuck. It is our job to develop an alternative model.*"⁸

Art that is *in service* – not *service art*

*Making services challenges
how artists are colonized by money.*⁹
BRETT BLOOM

Art that is in service is nothing new. But it is not until recently that artists make the scrutiny of their own practice in relations to the world the subject of art. Traditionally art took place in secluded, privileged niches. Since medieval ages artisans serve the ruling class on a commission. Self-indulging, often utopian art practices like *Action Art* of the 60s seems more of a contemplative group experience on one's own behalf. Whereas activist and confrontational movements like the *Situationists* serve in the name of a reactionary ideology. Noteworthy also is the recent example of what famed art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud's calls *Relational Aesthetics* that demonstrates how finicky the connection between service and art remains to date, when he writes: "*Present-day*

⁵ Berman, Sheri, 1997. Civil Society and Political Institutionalization. *American Behavioral Scientist*, no. 40 (5), page 565.

⁶ 2. Zeldin

⁷ 3. Zeldin

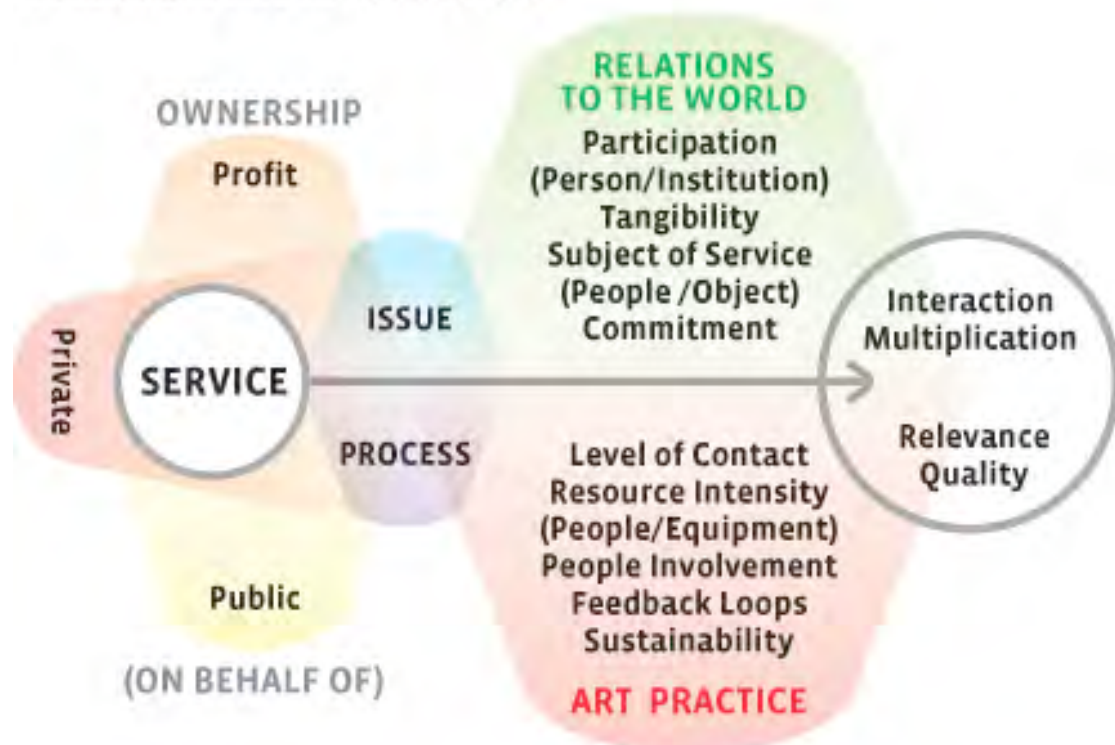
⁸ 4. Zeldin

⁹ Bloom, Brett, 2006. *Alluvial Deposits*. (To date not yet published article).

*art does not present the outcome of a labor, it is the labor itself, or the labor-to-be.*¹⁰ At the same time Bourriaud curates the installation of Rirkrit Tiravanija, who cooks Thai food for gallery visitors in order to **sell** them afterwards the litter and remnants of the shared meal... In the end the artist gets paid for what turns out to be a pretentious kind of *service art*, which succumbs to an insignificant transaction within the market system. Art that is not just a service, but *in service* not only questions existing power structures, but acts differently from them, and doesn't simply *pretend critically* within them.¹¹

Therefore, art practice that is not just servicing personal, economical, or authoritarian ambitions needs to scrutinize its relationships and dependencies. We are looking for an art as a kind of public service and open investigation that creates social spaces, which didn't exist before. The understanding of art that is *in service* deals directly with life realities and is not just contemplating from an exiled and self-indulged position. It goes into action based on participation and solidarity that inspires or identifies empathy, responding to Zeldin's explicit remark: "*Art has not yet caught up with showing the individuality and complexity of individuals. What can we do about this? We have to get away from stereotypes.*"¹²

DIMENSIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS



Responsive art practice gives careful consideration to organizational ownership and relational dependencies implicated in the process of service.¹³

¹⁰ Bourriaud, Nicolas, 1998 (2002). *Relational Aesthetics*. Les Presses du Réel, Paris, page 110. Translated from French by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods.

¹¹ 2. Bloom. *Alluvial Deposits*.

¹² 5. Zeldin

¹³ Cook, David P. Goh, Chon-Huat. Chun, Chen H. 1999. *Service Typologies: A State Of The Art Survey*. School of Business, Camden, Rutgers University, page 325. (adaption)

On the following pages we acquaint us with the work of four project- and dialog-based art practitioners who consciously utilize the framework of service in various degrees. Based on interviews with the artists we will discuss their projects and put them in social and methodological perspective through secondary source material. While looking at *how* contemporary, pro-social art can be *in* service and become (more) relevant for human co-existence, we are locating where the limitations and pitfalls are within the service paradigm.

CASE STUDY I: **ART THAT PROVIDES SERVICES**

Brett Bloom, Chicago **Temporary Services**

*When I encounter art, I ask myself:
How does this help me understand the lives of others?
How does it move me towards other people
in new and unexpected ways?¹⁴*

ROMAN KRZNARIC

In the late 90s Brett Bloom abandoned abstract painting and founded with Salem Collo-Julín and Marc Fisher the art collective *Temporary Services*, an initiative, which embraces open-ended social processes and works with communities outside of art venues in response to growing social discrepancies. "As most of the national funding for the arts collapsed in the 80s many artists moved to LA or NY to pursue commercial careers. For us it was a call to look at the buried social context of our low-income working class neighborhood here in Northern Chicago. We wanted to use art to help reconfigure a world that often isn't working and that disempowers. We wanted to feel as a part of that by providing services to help turn things around. So we grew into the public practice. Our name *Temporary Services* is a way to better blend in with the cheap restaurants, dollar stores, temporary employment agencies rather than to be recognizable as an art space. The distinction between art practice and other creative human endeavors is irrelevant to us."¹⁵

¹⁴ 2. Krznic.

¹⁵ Bloom, Brett, 2006, October 31. Cofounder of artist group *Temporary Services* in Chicago. Telephone interview (Copenhagen/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saito.

Project Flood



PROJECT FLOOD (1993) BRETT BLOOM and art group Haha run a service shop with soil-less veggie garden for persons with HIV and neighbors in a Chicago neighborhood.

"Back in 1993 we got involved in a citywide art initiative titled *Culture in Action*. Together with the art group *Haha* we launched project Flood in a storefront space in Rogers Park. We build a *hydroponic*, soil-less garden in front of the space to grow produce without bacteria for people living with HIV. The produce was consequently delivered to the people needing it. The garden served as a model and showcase for others. The space interior had racks with informational material and was used as a basis for meetings, raising food, demonstrating growing techniques and hosting conversations. Flood lasted for three years, well beyond our original intentions, migrated into more than one locale. It grew and took on its own life."¹⁶

Flood presented itself both as a service and community resource. As artists began to share the fate with the struggling middle class they moved away from object-based ways of working to provide practical services with their art projects aimed at solidarity and mutual empowerment. This resulted in a project-based approach, which involves an expending amount of labor that cannot be transacted. This labor, which in economic terms would be called *service provision* (as opposed to *goods provision*) may include:

- The work of interpretation or analysis of sites and situations.
- The work of presentation and installation.
- The work of public education.
- Advocacy and community based work like organizing and documenting.

¹⁶ 2. Bloom. Interview.

- The creation of alternative structures.¹⁷

Brett Bloom explains that the *service provision* of art is not just a sociological analysis but making apparent the invisible: "An artist can come and present perspectives on how things are done. It is a kind of institutional critic. It is the social spaces that artists produce by looking at the suppressed, the unrecognizable that is already there."¹⁸ This makes art that is *in service* distinct from commercial and social services, which aggregate and integrate solutions *within* a given frameset.

Remarkable is that project Flood need not to be considered as art to be experienced or to be effective. Prolonging the lives for people living with HIV serves some other purpose than art, which is one of its strengths. It can have multiple functions for people with different concerns and levels of engagement. All attempts to name this sort of art practice fall short to acknowledge how they may or not inspire aesthetic reflection, or how they really work in a social context that can't be reduced to an aesthetic symbol or metaphor.

The desire to provide services that are meaningful for diverse audiences comes from paying attention to the social context, in which art is produced and received. Project Flood made its own conditions outside of existing authoritarian structures. It took care of other people by making room for discussion and debate, and created new ways for art to be useful. In this context service relationships provide a familiarity where individuals can *negotiate behavior* that is sensitive to and considerate of the feelings and needs of others. At the same time everybody involved experiences that there are ways to deal with differences other than avoidance or discrimination.¹⁹

Art has an opportunity to use the service model for building conscious and self-chosen relations to the world like Brett Bloom explains: "Service for me personally means to actually being there on location, by having an active role in the process. By this I avoid the commodification of art, which is an extension of my life, where I am building the relationships that I want."²⁰

Service is part of an intentional approach of inquiry and action. The desire for intentional change makes the service paradigm appropriate when action needs to be taken and where knowledge and information is not complete. This is the place for community-related art, which purpose is to deal with things that were created elsewhere, including the re-functioning and mirroring of culture and conditions. Ethically sound service can turn art practice into an advocacy for its life context and beauty is found in what encourages, inspires and identifies not only understanding, but

¹⁷ 3. Bloom. Alluvial Deposits.

¹⁸ 3. Bloom. Interview.

¹⁹ Nelson, Harold G. Stoltermann, Erik, 2002. Design as Being in Service. Staffordshire University Press, page 8.

²⁰ 4. Bloom. Interview.

empathy and deeds.²¹

INTENTIONAL APPROACHES



Art that is in service moves from its traditionally persuading and manipulative stance into a co-creative framework that is empathizing and conspiring (adopted model of Harold G. Nelson²²).

CASE STUDY II: **THIS IS ART, NOT SOCIAL WORK**

Tadej Pogacar, Ljubljana

P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art

*I am enormously impressed
by the amount of self-development
some people at the homeless center acquired
in the course of very difficult lives.
But the disadvantage for the poor
comes from the fact that
they know only poor people.²³*
THEODORE ZELDIN

As artist, curator, and sociological researcher Tadej Pogacar operates since 1990 under the name P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art, which is a highly mobile and organic forum for Tadej's systemic investigation in self-organization and his continuous participation in collaborative projects worldwide. His sensibility for social relations comes from personal observation of marginalized groups. Initially he worked independently on utopian and activist projects before engaging in collaborations where, as he puts it "the service paradigm is the connecting interface between research and social groups: nowadays we mediate and communicate art in direct disposition to the public where it is crucial how the audience is involved

²¹ 3. Krznaric.

²² 2. Nelson, Stoltermann. Page 8.

²³ 6. Zeldin.

and contracted.”²⁴ Following the historical model, Tadej Pogacar sees the role of the artist as transforming, putting himself into different roles of society: “Playful activity makes evident what systems don’t function properly especially [public] services, which are based on the now, the local, and society. Services are systems that should help people in many aspects. The main function of capitalist systems is not to assist people, but to produce income. The focus of the overall system is not on how to facilitate the real needs of citizens. Therefore questioning the state of the order is an ongoing and indispensable process.”²⁵ Ultimately the artist is a moral figure through positive attitude, sincerity, and solid work.

Project CODE:RED



CODE:RED (2006) TADEJ POGACAR brings the sex worker’s fashion label DASPU to the art biennale '06 in Sao Paolo.

“For the past decade I am involved in an ongoing project with active civil organizations in Ljublijana, New York, Rio de Janeiro and Madrid. CODE:RED is a long term work-in-process, which investigates and discusses aspects of prostitution and sex work as a specific form of *parallel economy*. In Brazil CODE:RED started with Mrs. Davida, a former sex worker who began organizing self-help meetings. Over time this turned into a movement that got a grip on fighting HIV. Last year they launched the Daspu fashion line, which got a lot of media attention since they use a name very similar to a prestigious label. Also, their models on the catwalk are all sex workers.

²⁴ Pogacar, Tadej, 2006, October 24. Founder of art initiative P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art in Ljublijana. Telephone interview (Ljublijana /Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saito.

²⁵ 2. Pogacar.

My contribution is to bring them to the art biennale in Sao Paulo, which runs under theme *creative co-existence*. In Madrid we continue with a gallery exhibition that includes a public workshop. In this open forum I am organizing a video installation and a large wall piece with paper masks similar to the ones recently used in street riots."²⁶

Tadej Pogacar's service provision is in the reconfiguration of his role as expanding, pro-social curator. Unlike Beurriaud who is constraint to the gallery-museum-apparatus, Pogacar investigates the margins of human co-existence more often outside than inside the gallery in direct context to the individuals and locations involved. That way the social cause doesn't depreciate into an art motive. Brett Bloom points out the service ethics of this expanded curatorial practice close to life: "*It is a way of working where art can be relevant, impact people's lives, create important conversations, effects change on small scale, and looks really good all at the same time.*"²⁷

The research of *self-organization* and *parallel economy* of urban minorities can be seen as Tadej Pogacar's service to the public. His interest lies in "the triggers, that pushes you to build the minimal structure to survive. In the mid 90s I started to work with homeless in my town, because marginalized groups are searching for alternative economic models. They are looking for *channels of survival* outside the dominant streams. This quest for an existence outside of the main system is similar to the artist's life practice outside of commerce."²⁸ Pogacar understands art as a public service also in the penetration of what constitutes our reality: "Many things in daily life look like unchangeable or unquestionable. It's the same with history where we forget everything after a month. Art is important to recall things and bring back old systems for reinvestigation. I am not interested to discuss art but what confines *the frame* we are living in, what the headline makes, what is setting the rules in our society. I am interested in how things truly function."²⁹

What does it take to deliver on this ambitious *service provision*? According to pedagogues a *service provider* assists individuals in becoming sensitive observers not only of the feeling states of others but also of the causes of these feelings. Key to this empathy (behavior of consideration) is the practice in perspective taking, conflict resolution, and assertiveness. Communication skills, which enable us to maintain clarity in conflict-charged, stressful situations. Service relationships help to provide a fabric of roles, ongoing process-embedded analysis and dealing with actual situations³⁰, but only as long as we commit the necessary dedication as Pogacar points out: "The first steps are really important. It can take a lot of time. First there has to take place a change in

²⁶ 3. Pogacar.

²⁷ 4. Bloom. Alluvial Deposits.

²⁸ 4. Pogacar.

²⁹ 5. Pogacar.

³⁰ 2. Nelson, Stoltermann.

yourself first, then a change in the head of others, which eventually can turn into action. It is a fact that people don't have or take the time. Everything has to be quick, be it in society or art. So it is important that we keep trying. That's why I pursue things I really like to do, so I meet people which inspire me and give me back the energy."³¹

Empathy in the case of a creative situation is the ability to *be* as the other while remaining a whole self. The way empathy and conspiracy can lead to a situation where *value contracts* are formed, relationships are built, is always unique. It has to be guided by attentive affinity and an equality of respect.³² "I position myself as a partner. I don't approach minorities as an artist who sells the spectacle. True collaboration means to do something together, to conceive something together. This is a long-term process where it is important that all sides involved can benefit. This requires research on what's suitable and appropriate. In the group we have to come to terms about the aims and the rules of the project. I see myself as somebody who provides space in the frame of art and media and brings topics to attention which otherwise don't get any publicity."³³ So when some traditionalists in the art world call Pogacar's practice rather derogatively *social work* then they appear to fear the potential of his sociological work-in-process. *Temporary Service* cofounder Brett Bloom clarifies: "*There is a clear difference between an artist using her creativity to make a new social reality possible and a person working for a government and implementing a non-creative, proscribed plan as part of a policy.*"³⁴

CASE STUDY III: STRATEGY OF SUBVERSION

Stefan Keller, Zurich

San Keller & Co.

*The unit of movement
is the meeting of two people.*³⁵

THEODORE ZELDIN

San Keller bases his life-art practice in the fundamentally existential level of being, the mundane routines which form behaviors and determine the depth of one's personal experience. "A decade ago I moved to a town completely new to me. I would go grocery shopping at a particular supermarket chain but go to a different branch store each time in order to get acquainted to the place while recording my spiraling itinerary on a milk carton."³⁶ San Keller usually singles out an aspect in his life routine, gives it a time frame, sets up rules and places it back into the everyday where he invites others to

³¹ 6. Pogacar.

³² Larsen, Lars Bang, 2003. Questioning the Social, Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art. Momentum International Art Conference. <http://kunst.no/questioning/old/lars.html>

³³ 7. Pogacar.

³⁴ 8. Pogacar.

³⁵ 7. Zeldin

³⁶ Keller, San Stefan, 2005, October 17. Telephone interview (Zurich/Kyoto) conducted and translated by Markuz Wernli Saito.

collectively share ways for new experiences. San Keller uses the service paradigm to package his actions and turn them into rituals where the moment is intensified.

The Long Way Home: San Keller accompanies you home



THE LONG WAY HOME (2004) SAN KELLER brings home one participant at a time beginning at Grand Central Station. Some won't see their bed before sunrise.

"The Swiss Institute for Contemporary Art in New York invited me to do an action during the winter months in late 2004. On the last Friday of each month at 10pm I met up with participants in the main hall of Grand Central Station. To be recognizable I was carrying a big sign with the action's title around my neck. Before embarking on The Long Way Home it had to be decided collectively on what route everybody would be taken home. Who would be home first? Who would be the last to return? What places would the journey lead through? Most interestingly, how would the dynamic of leadership work out? Consequently each of these actions congregated a coincidental community that, starting at Grand Central Station, made their long journey home together leading to one home after the other. Snugly returned, the home-comers were supposed to provide the remaining participants with a simple meal. We advertised the action with flyers and posters so that anyone living in New York could participate. The only condition to participate was to write an experience report within one week. What started really small with three participants ended four months later with 32."³⁷

When San Keller appears as a service provider he sets up a professional frame in an effort to create an ambiguity between the utilitarian home going and the aesthetics of breaking behavior patterns on the collective

³⁷ 2. Keller.

night walk home. Service here is repurposed as what Bourriaud calls "*wavering between contemplation and use*."³⁸ The formal aspects from the service world infuse San Keller's practice with a spirit of entrepreneurship borrowed straight from the business realm. San Keller usually teams up with a renown PR writer and graphic designer to merge personal exploration with a self-declared artistic service offering. One could argue that Keller's service provision is the self-inflicted mental and physical sacrifice in his participants. This as part of a subversive strategy, which encourages borderline experiences outside the ordinary (the shared way home with endless detours) and seemingly uselessness effort (the waste of time) emphasized in light of our culture of convenience. In Nicolas Bourriaud's view San Keller's actions present "*the service encounter as a valuable alternative to the predominant producer-consumer relationship*"³⁹.

San Keller understands his *action services* as the full partnership of all involved, who work in conspiracy. He emphasizes the aspect of friendship in his projects, which holds a tensional but collaborative social system. That's where (in)formal agreements come into play in Keller's work where participants more often than not sign contracts – either explicit or in *implied* form, which built on principles that are made explicit. Bourriaud acknowledges that in the true service provision everybody is a stakeholder and shapes dynamic forms of *value contracting*. This in contrast to most of economics, which operates within *legal contracting* and a static supplier-client relation. It is the agreements that are subject to (re)arrangement on equal terms, which make the artist and participant to partners of the endeavor. Following negotiated rules, keeping the promises, and obliging the *contract* with its explicit and implicit guarantees, both the participants and artist are players who equally contribute to the success of the activity.⁴⁰

It is no surprise that such dynamic relationships with their dispersed and leveled power require a high degree of commitment and involvement.⁴¹ The communication skills needed are both technical and social. The social skills include responsibility, empathy, leadership and the ability to advocate this kind of art practice. San Keller notes that the concepts of his actions are based on the *act of speaking*: "We make promises and formulate contracts which are being authenticated through our actions. It comes down to '*Doing Things With Words*' which expands over four stages. The *act of expression* is grounded on a language system that requires the *adoption of language* from the speaker [ability to communicate], whose *presence* [ability to relate] depends on space and time as a prerequisite to establish a *contract* [expression of commitment] with the partner and within a *fabric of places and relationships* [ability to share intimacy]."⁴²

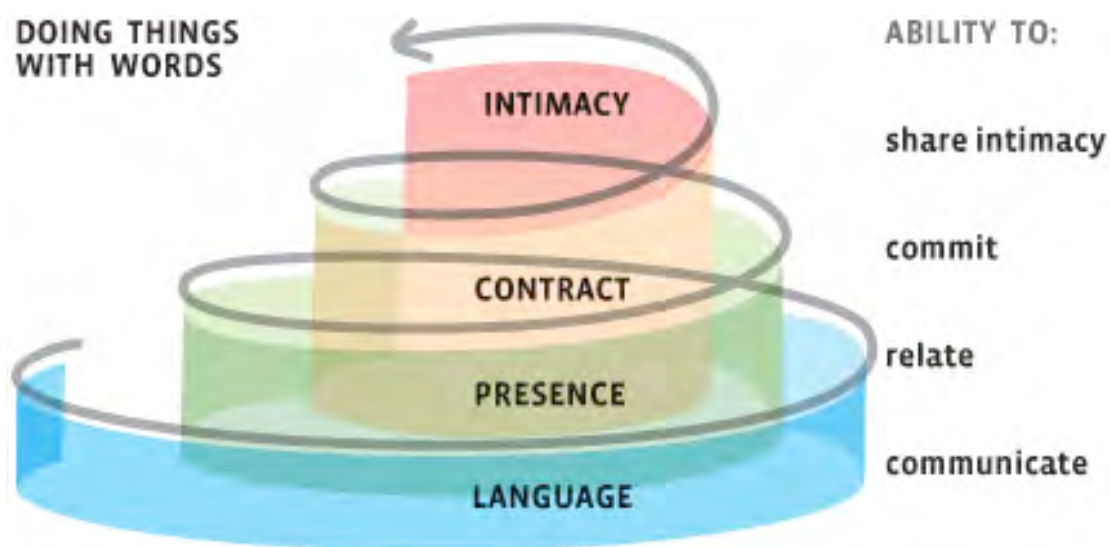
³⁸ 3. Bourriaud, page 35.

³⁹ 2. Bourriaud, page 83.

⁴⁰ Kapusta, Dora. Kuenzli, Urs. Schelling Ulrike, 2004. San Keller: Aktion und Alltag. Schule fuer Gestaltung Zuerich, page 8 (translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saito).

⁴¹ 2. Cook, Goh, Chun. Page 327.

⁴² 3. Keller.



Service implies the making of a promise based on shared language and presence that allows for partnerships in a convivial *conspiracy* towards collective action.

With the very literal adaptation of what is known in economics as *service drama* San Keller becomes the self-declared *service director*. Not only is he setting up the rules of the game, but is also starring as *main act* of the episode indicated in the action's title where the artist's name represents the trade mark: 'San Keller accompanies you home'. It is questionable how so much drama can propel empathy and bring art truly closer to life. The roles in Kellers *service actions* between service provider (initiator) and service receiver (participants) tend to be divided and establish a relationship that is rather directional and constraint. This ultimately narrows the potential of experience and transformations.

**CASE STUDY IV: CONVERSATION PIECES OF GIVING AND TAKING
Lori Gordon, San Francisco**

*Art has not yet caught up with showing
the individuality and complexity of individuals.*

What can we do about this?

We have to get away from stereotypes.⁴³

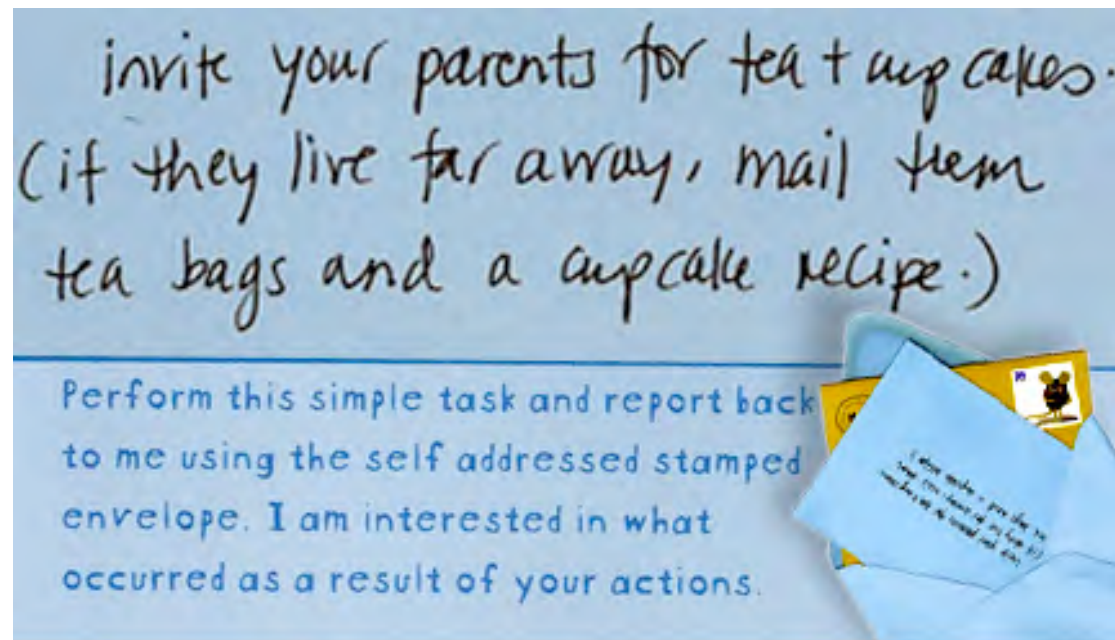
THEODORE ZELDIN

Through a variety of media, Lori Gordon's work investigates the structure and power of belief systems. Through simple acts of human connection, Lori Gordon creates pieces, which question reductive notions that a person can exist in the world without faith and trust. It is evident that the process of art itself cannot function without the willing participation of a faithful audience. Lori Gordon is particularly interested in the gift economy that exists within the service realm, which has been an important subject matter for artists in Northern California since the 1970s. Through giving

⁴³ 8. Zeldin

and working with others she hopes to learn about herself and to create places of reciprocity.

Project MiE: Make It Everyday



MAKE IT EVERYDAY (2005) LORI GORDON asks participants to do simple inter-personal tasks and report back the reactions via letter (pre-stamped).

"Last year I started the project *Make It Everyday* where I give out personal letters to gallery and studio visitors. The envelope contains handwritten, personal instructions with a simple task like: '*invite your parents for tea and a cup cakes (if they life far away mail them tea bags and cup cake recipe).*' Those that take the letters are invited to report back on their actions, through the enclosed and pre-stamped return envelope. I am interested not only in whether the viewers will reciprocate and follow the directions, but also as to what occurs after the initial action. As a result strangers keep writing me back in all sincerity and share their experiences."⁴⁴

Lori Gordon is exploring exchange systems based on choosing and building conscious relationships. "I am interested in the gift economy. The idea of give-and-take – the exchange without explicit agreement – based on a kind of *reciprocal altruism*. Service can be the giving without necessarily receiving something in return as seen in the *Potlatch*: guests are invited to a *Potlatch* to share food and receive gifts or payment. To make a gift is a rather self-serving and not self-less act since we expect something in return. People working in the gift economy who think they're generous are in a trap."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Gordon Auffhammer, Lori, 2006, October 21. Telephone interview (San Francisco/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saito.

⁴⁵ 2. Gordon Auffhammer.

Lori considers herself not per se as a service-based artist and mentions that service is just one part of her practice. *"I do things for people, but I also do isolated projects, work specifically done on my behalf. I hope that through working with others you can learn about yourself. Working with the other is important to me because when I am received as a whole person it is a place where I can fail."*⁴⁶ Nurturing this safety net can be seen as Lori Gordon's *service provision*. She creates places, where human spirit can flourish through the investment in connections. Because it is generally difficult to get people to participate Lori Gordon emphasizes to keep project ideas as simple and straightforward as possible: *"The more layered the experience is, the greater chances are to lose the person. People live busy lives and are skeptical. Important is to explicitly invite and ask anybody for feedback. My hope is always that people reciprocate and to establish an intimate connection with a stranger. Acknowledge me, recognize and love me for the way I am. This call for empathy is dear to me because a large part of the art world is sarcastic and dark."*⁴⁷

Art practitioners concerned with human co-existence often work in the paradigm of service as a hands-on strategy to commit individual and public lives into a co-creative process where inquiry, action and use(fullness) become the agents of beauty which is not without challenges: *"There is a fine line between sincerity and irony in art. You have to be convinced in order to convince others because you ask a lot of them. My own doubts are guiding me. An idea has to be as exciting today as yesterday. I ask myself what makes me feel elevated? It is a deep sense of longing and connection, the authentic yearning for exchange and reciprocation. Of course I could just give out sandwiches at Union Square here in town. But it is the residue of the ephemeral I am invested in that and I enjoy doing. It is important to question why we are doing this art and what our true intentions are by documenting it. It's crucial to carefully look at one's own work and understand the way one is communicating to the world, including factors like desire and concern, awareness of the other, and the complexity of life."*⁴⁸

The service relationship brings everyone involved along at the same pace, in the same place and depends as much on the outcome as on communicating the progress. Service is not a process of convincing people of something they have not authored. Service relationships outside of the business context underscore the intentionality of those being served (the participants, the public) that trigger the creative process. Being in service as an art practitioner demands heightened and refined ability to listen. Lori Gordon shares what her principles are: *"We [the artists] are setting the standards. I am a perfectionist, thinking, worrying about the details. When something is sincere I can believe in it. You have to be convinced in order to convince*

⁴⁶ 3. Gordon Auffhammer.

⁴⁷ 4. Gordon Auffhammer.

⁴⁸ 5. Gordon Auffhammer.

others because you ask a lot of them. That way you generate a platform for others to speak and find trust. The doubts inside of me are guiding me.”⁴⁹ Lori Gordon is pointing to the act of attention that is complete and uncompromising, that senses the fine nuances. This mindset brings into focus details and patterns of connection that elude more passive encounters and allows a relationship of true empathy to form between the partners. “I am truly amazed about what profoundly deep encounters that are possible, e.g. when people write me back in all sincerity within the *Make It Everyday* project.”⁵⁰

CONCLUSION: **SERVICE AS ONE INTERSTICE OF ART AND LIFE**

*I think that every time we create outside institutions,
independently, or individually,
relationships and better knowledge of one another,
we are changing the world
in that we have created equalities
that didn't exist before.*⁵¹

THEODORE ZELDIN

The four case studies above have in common that all the practitioners share a service ethics, which enables them to pursue art that is close to life and builds on the empathy of the individuals involved. If we chart out where each art practice is located in respect to its motivation and relationships the differences of service and its application become evident.

In *FLOOD* we find a group of artists who set up an unpretentious *service shop* in order to reach and unite neighbors for a concrete, useful purpose. Because it remains highly accessible on all stages this model can be a kick-starter for transformations in the community. The art practitioners are not only responsive visionaries, but also *service makers* equal to anybody engaged. A similar level of communal responsiveness can be seen in *CODE:RED* through the mediation efforts on behalf of existential needs in a marginal group like sex workers. Here the art practitioner is less the incubator of a transformation rather than a *curator-in-service*. He is providing a public service in the sense of retaining and exposing knowledge which feeds the fundamental discussions on human co-existence that is in line with the artist's convictions and interests. *THE LONG WAY HOME* is situated more in the realm of manipulative and self-indulgent art practice since it primarily propagates the concept and perception of the artist. A smartly staged *service episode* becomes not only the instrument of subversion but of persuasion and enrollment and leads into clearly prescribed roles between the artist (master of ceremony) and participant (receiver of services). As much as the artist is encouraging strong bonding through shared personal transformations its

⁴⁹ 6. Gordon Auffhammer.

⁵⁰ 7. Gordon Auffhammer.

⁵¹ 9. Zeldin

relationships are based on a traditional, authoritarian dependency. *MAKE IT EVERYDAY* represents a service rooted in its most ethical sense that propels non-material exchanges of value among individuals and communities. With a balance of free-will participation and self-indulgence the art practitioner creates safe, private spaces for primal human needs of recognition, failure and reciprocation.

APPLICATIONS OF SERVICE



Depending on where motivation and relations are positioned service takes on different qualities as seen in the four represented case studies.

Art that is *in service* is usually characterized as pragmatic, task-based work-in-process, which is independent of any specific material production that cannot be transacted as or along with a product. The service provision in art describes not only the economic condition of project work (labor that is relevant to life context) but gives tribute to the nature of social relations under which it is carried out. This essential duality of 'useful model of labor' *in conjunction with* the 'relational consciousness of a whole' distinguishes art service practice from business services, which leaves no room to question the authoritarian and relational arrangements it takes place.

Services in art evolve around issues and not ideologies. Social and cultural mobilization is anchored increasingly on issues rather than ideologies or programs as we can see in the work of *Temporary Services* and Tadej Pogacar. Many issues remain untackled and fall between the ideological dividing lines that often are in the way of finding effective, collective solutions. There is a danger that artists surrender under the pressure of the market into a kind of merchandising of relations and experience. Connecting to people, creating interactive, communicative experience, but to what purpose? What does the new kind of connectivity produce? Economics put the degree of participant's involvement and resonance in direct relation to the tangibility of the subject matter. To facilitate artful services that are close to life means to look at the different relational processes in people, information and assets.

Relational Aesthetics that uses the service paradigm to justify commercial art practices and symbolic avant-garde aesthetics of the past⁵² was detrimental to art that is *in service*. This doesn't mean that there isn't a need for art-as-service. Experiencing art right at the places where one lives is critical. It helps to move art from privileged seclusion to positions directly related to how we live our lives. Service can be not only a working model, but friendly *camouflage* for art to blend in with normal life. Art that is in service of everyday life context contests the power experts have over how art gets seen, interpreted and transacted. When you remove the power, new experiences become possible.

Art practice can locate the sharing and learning about each other that already occurs amidst our daily lives, and make sure it is noticed, and that it becomes inspiring. Roman Krznaric suggests that the art practitioner "*becomes a new kind of tour guide, not producing original works, but taking the public out into the world to see itself [and] identify the empathy that already exists*".⁵³ Art is *in service* when it provides surprising and new openings in our individual and public lives, as a reminder that everybody is in service to make our society more civil and empathetic. Art in a world often lacking real connections and depth needs to become a committed and consistent interlocutor of civil life. Art in the service of a community deliberately seeks to get "*a balanced view of where the world is going*"⁵⁴ by involving various groups and classes. Empathy not only is crucial to improve the understanding in people but also improves the learning experience in individuals and groups. Educators have long realized that humans understand better, more broadly, and more deeply in the context of actually doing something meaningful *with others*. Referred to as *service learning*⁵⁵ it is a combination of conviviality, mutual awareness and shared experience.

Manipulation with limits

Pro-social art practice finds in the service paradigm the potential of subtly but steadily manipulating the world, allowing simultaneously for pleasure, interpretation, practice and critique. The pleasure derived from manipulation of circumstance is evidence of our unfinished understanding of any given framework.⁵⁶ The concept of art-as-service is to be considered just one of *many* entry points. Services one component in an eco system towards a greater empathy. In Brett Bloom's words: "*Art that is relegated to a service can end up being the shallow aesthetization of social relations, or just another job, as opposed to a robust way of working with transformative potential that exceeds the material and social conditions of the moment. We have to start thinking beyond services where one figures out something for oneself and where we figure out something collectively in order to co-create real conditions for thinking*

⁵² 5. Bloom. Alluvial Deposits.

⁵³ 4. Krznaric.

⁵⁴ 10. Zeldin

⁵⁵ Waterman, Alan S., 1997. Service-Learning: Applications from the Research. Lawrence Erlbaum, London. Page 153.

⁵⁶ 2. Larsen.

*and acting differently.*⁵⁷ Bloom who works with the service paradigm for more than a decade finds it insufficient to explain and negotiate the power structure we find ourselves in: "We shouldn't focus too much on the rigid structure of service but consider *distributed aesthetics* which look at the complexity of aesthetic experiences. People create uncontrollable situations and I think that connecting to people's desires can provide unexpected experiences."⁵⁸

In order to better to leverage service performances, business theorists use the theater metaphor and like to deploy a *script* to better control the outcome of transactions. But in art practice, service that succumbs to a mere episode is not credible. If the economic frameset is taken all too literally into art practice as seen in *The Long Way Home* it tends to predetermine rather one-dimensional relationships as illustrated by Brett Bloom. "Providing services doesn't resonate and doesn't really warm people up. Service in art practice puts you more into the role of an actor, which implies a certain directional, economic relationship, which detracts from finding ways to empower others. It is important to take the *drama* out of it, to open things up and have people create their own meaning."⁵⁹

In order to become not a prisoner of the service paradigm (and any paradigm for that matter) we are brought back to the elementary question Theodore Zeldin is prompting, not just to artists, but to everybody interested in an empathetic and therefore artful life: "*Instead of our military arrangements in society we are finding ourselves turning to private life, and saying, how is it that we wish to organize our relations?*"⁶⁰

⁵⁷ 6. Bloom. Alluvial Deposits.

⁵⁸ 6. Bloom. Interview.

⁵⁹ 5. Bloom. Interview.

⁶⁰ 11. Zeldin



AT-YOUR SERVICE (2006) MARKUZ WERNLI SAITO offers unsolicited, daily one-hour-services on their own behalf in the urban public of Kyoto for 56 days.