

THE NECESSITY OF PUBLIC HUMANITIES

INTRODUCTION

Post-secondary institutions have, for decades, had little to no relationship with local communities and their projects/programming, the two even appearing antithetical. However, recently as the university has begun to take seriously the benefits of practices such as 'experiential learning', 'community engagement', 'knowledge mobilization', and 'civic duty', public humanities as an emerging field has begun to present itself as a priority for many in the academy. Faculty in the Arts and Humanities have started to utilize this newer field as a way of re-imagining how the university may interact with communities and how the two can participate in knowledge exchange and knowledge production.

WHAT ARE THE PUBLIC HUMANITIES?

PUBLIC HUMANITIES IS NOT ONLY CONCERNED WITH THE MOBILIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE FROM INSTITUTIONS/PRIVATE BODIES TO THE COMMUNITY AND VICE VERSA, BUT ALSO ENCOURAGES KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AS A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BETWEEN BOTH PARTIES WITH THE AIM OF REVISING EPISTEMOLOGY AND CREATING PROJECTS THAT BENEFIT COMMUNITIES.

OBJECTIVE

To understand how public humanities operates in London, i.e. their aims, objectives, and programming to therefore analyze the efficacy of public humanities as an emerging field in the humanities.

WORKING WITH THE EMBASSY CULTURAL HOUSE

Established in 1983, the Embassy Cultural House was a community-driven gallery and hosted interdisciplinary programs. It closed its physical doors in 1990. In 2020 the Embassy Cultural House was re-envisioned as a virtual artist-run space and community website.

Onboarded as a Contributing Editor at the Embassy Cultural House, I was able to attend their weekly meetings, events, and engage with the planning of their projects and programming. I was also afforded the opportunity to create my own project, **The George Floyd Project**.

THE GEORGE FLOYD PROJECT

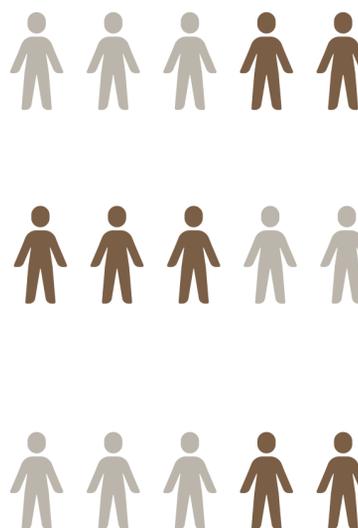
The George Floyd Project is a reflection on the murder of George Floyd at the one-year commemoration of his death. Remembering his life, the elevated Anti-Black racism discourse around his death, and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement over the last year, I was also interested in understanding how local Black artists and community organizers have been impacted. I wanted to use ECH platform and resources to, not only showcase the work of local Black peoples in London, but to start necessary conversations with them about their priorities, creative process, and transgressions managing their work in a predominantly white city. Alongside the primary reflection piece, **The George Floyd Project** also consists of two other parts:

- Black Artist Spotlight
- Local Powerful Black Voices



BLACK ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

The Black Artist Spotlight aims at better understanding how local Black art and the creative process of Black artists have been impacted by the murder of George Floyd. In this portion of *The George Floyd Project*, each month platformed local Black artists to share some of their work and use the ECH as a space to share some of the work they've created in the past year.



LOCAL POWERFUL BLACK VOICES

Local Powerful Black Voices is the project's way of intercepting the grassroots organizing and advocacy work taking place in London by Black community leaders. In this portion of *The George Floyd Project*, each month I interview a new Black community organizer and gain their perspective on how the murder of George Floyd has impacted their work and the larger London atmosphere.

ANALYSIS

Public humanities is a notable opportunity for institutions to deconstruct traditional ideas of what critical thought and work can look like, however, as Monica Muñoz Martinez in *RACIAL FORGETTING AND PRESENT HISTORY* illustrates, faculty often monopolize projects, thereby continuing to gatekeep knowledge. Public humanities should not operate by way of the academy nor community leaders alone.

CONCLUSION

1. The university can do a better job at reconciling with and involving marginalized communities.
2. There is room at the academy to re-envision methods of knowledge production and mobilization.
3. Public humanities must consistently be in collaboration with, and not taught at, the community.
4. To meaningfully participate in public humanities, a 'third space' as theorized by Homi Bhabhamust, is essential in order to equally share and build programs for the ultimate benefit of the community.