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Communicative Methodologies and Mechanisms in Public Art

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Fine Arts

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Communicative Methodologies and Mechanisms in Public Art

(Thesis format: Integrated)

by

Jeremy Jeresky

Graduate Program in Visual Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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Abstract and Keywords

*Communicative Methodologies and Mechanisms in Public Art* articulates my community based public art practice and MFA research based in London, Ontario. This dossier of research includes: a comprehensive artist statement, a case study and a documentation of artistic practice and development; in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 respectively. This written and photographic documentation is intended to represent my thesis exhibition. In the body of the thesis I look to my artist statement as a method and means to establish a framework in order to understand, analyze and evaluate public art. I feel that developing a framework that is in concert with the context of my experiences and areas of interest as a community based public artist in London Ontario Canada is essential in creating and maintaining a relevant, well informed and perhaps most importantly, an open-minded practice. I also look to my case study as a means to articulate and purvey the philosophical and theoretical framework of my practice.

**Keywords:** broad public, general public, stakeholder, stakeholder-ship, public art's aesthetic function, public art's cultural function, public art's socially symbolic function, procurement, placement, consultative methodology, communicative methodology, communicative mechanism, commodification, East Village Community, Jochen Gerz, Grant Kester, Rachel Whiteread, Lorain Leeson, Freemont Troll, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Daniel Hunting, Richard Serra, Ark Aid Street Mission.
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Introduction

Content of Thesis Dossier

This thesis dossier is composed of three chapters. The first chapter is my comprehensive artist statement. I have utilized this body of writing as a means to articulate how I think about and evaluate public art in relation to my experiences and areas of interest as a community based public artist in London, Ontario. I have therefore developed my artist statement as a framework which examines particular relationships, functions, and evaluative schematics inherent to public art. This includes a consideration of the horizon of stakeholders involved in public art. More specifically this examines the artist's role within this horizon. I also consider the many functions of public art which include its aesthetic, cultural and socially symbolic function. Furthermore, my artist statement examines these factors in relation to municipal public art policy, community based public art and the 'Creative City' urban renewal and civic planning strategy. Considerations of how various types of public art have been evaluated by critics and authors is also articulated in my artist statement. Moreover, I have examined how the procurement and placement of public art relates to this.

Yet, within this spectrum exists two significant channels of communication inherent to public art that interest me the most. The first is public consultation which I demarcate as a communicative methodology because it is practiced and implemented in different ways. The second is the socially symbolic function of public art which I demarcate as a communicative mechanism. This is an intrinsically dualistic form of communication that is based on social positions of acceptance or resistance. Both of these channels of communication are inextricably linked and are also influenced and
related to the aforementioned elements.

Chapter Two consists of my Case study Jochen Gerz and his twinned projects the *Future Monument* and the *Public Bench*, in Coventry City Centre. This case study is particularly relevant to my practice and my artist statement because it identifies and explains terms such as the public interest, public art's aesthetic, cultural and socially symbolic function. It also examines how communities can be identified and/or formulated through public art's consultative process and its capacity for social symbolism. This case study also articulates how Gerz took a community based consultative and co-creative approach to a large scale urban regeneration public art initiative. It also examines Gerz's consultative process, which utilized intellectually and emotionally relevant questions in order to establish the meaning and significance of the *Future Monument* and *Public Bench* in relation to the context where he was working.

Chapter Three consists of the documentation of my community based public art practice. This includes photographic, graphic (poster and leaflet examples), and text. There are several projects that I facilitated in the East Village community and beyond within London, Ontario, Canada. In addition to the documentation I have also written a project descriptive which contextualizes each project and illustrates how they relate to my artist statement and case study.
Chapter 1

Comprehensive Artist Statement

It’s no secret that public art encompasses an extremely broad field. Not surprisingly the ways in which public art can be thought about, experienced and evaluated is just as broad. For this reason I look to my artist statement as a heuristic and evaluative tool. I feel that developing a framework that is in concert with the context of my experiences and areas of interest as a community based public artist in London Ontario Canada is essential in creating and maintaining a relevant, well informed and perhaps most importantly, an open-minded practice.

I am interested in two particular communicative processes within fields of North American and British municipal and community based public art. These communicative processes are articulated in municipal public art in two ways. First, in its socially symbolic function, which signifies social values, forces or aspirations that have little to do with the intrinsic artistic qualities or meaning of the art object. Municipal public art policy utilizes public art's capacity for social symbolism to advance imperatives such as national, civic and communal identity formation, as well as tourism and economic development. Municipal public art's capacity for social symbolism is also paradoxically dualistic. It can signify the liberalist freedom of artistic expression within the public interest or signify authoritative concepts opposed to the public. Second, within its public consultative process which seeks feedback from artists, corporations, public interest groups and individuals regarding the procurement and placement of public art.

These communicative processes are articulated in community based public art in two similar
ways. First, within its socially symbolic function, which serves to signify community cohesion and identity formation, the commodification of localized cultural expression, the ideology of egalitarianism and participatory democracy, and in some cases, antagonism against institutional authorities. Second, within its public consultative approach which uses the art making process as means to thematize its socially symbolic function. For clarity purposes I will refer to the socially symbolic function of public art as a communicative mechanism and I will refer the to public consultative process as a communicative methodology.

Although these communicative mechanisms and methodologies within municipal and community based public art exhibit philosophical and pragmatic similarities and differences, they both encompass a range of stakeholders in varying and selective ways. A stakeholder is a person or a group who has a vested interest in utilizing public art's capacity for social symbolism. The range of stakeholders includes the public administrative or commissioning body, which would represent the state or the municipality. The range of stakeholders also includes the general public, which could entail corporations, small business, cultural institutions, special interest community organizations and groups, private donors, and artists. A broad public could be said to encompass a silent stakeholder-ship because their interests and needs are represented by municipal, community or cultural institutions of the general public. But what does this mean for the artist? As a stakeholder the artist must negotiate and navigate a working relationship within the horizon of stakeholders. As such the artist's role can range from that of an autonomous material/process/ and visual culture specialist to that of a co-creator and/or inter-communal liaison depending on the communicative methodology and mechanism required to meet the needs or interests of said stakeholders.

It is worthy to note that the procurement and placement of both municipal and community based
public art determines the range and role of stakeholders. For example public art purchased with tax payer monies and placed on highly visible public property like a park or plaza will be subject to different standards and expectations from stakeholders than public art that is privately funded and placed on private property such as a shopping mall. Moreover, it is worthy to note that the aesthetic and cultural function of municipal and community based public art also determines the range and role of stakeholders. For example public art's aesthetic and cultural function can include community building and development, and urban beautification and decoration (both of which can function to generate municipal and community economic development). Public art can also function to publicly challenge preconceived notions and ideas in provocative, innovative or perhaps experimental ways. This would include public art which utilizes aesthetic, spatial and conceptual tactics of provocation, ambiguity and open ended interpretations of constructed social-time spaces. Thus, because public art has different functions, it is subject to different standards and expectations from stakeholders.

Social Symbolism as a Communicative Mechanism and Public Consultation as a Communicative Methodology in Municipal Public Art

For over fifty years cities all over North America have engaged in municipal public art programs. The first was introduced in Philadelphia in 1959. Currently, there are over 300 American cities with public art ordinances as part of their planning and cultural mandates in private and public projects. In Canada, the first program began in the 1950s when the Province of Quebec introduced its Art in Architecture Program. Today, over 50 Canadian municipalities have comprehensive and long term public art policies embedded within municipal and community planning imperatives. According to the City of London Ontario Public Art Program (2009), the best of these programs have created 'visionary plans' for the strategic placement of public art in their communities.
Historically, municipal public art policy directed the procurement and placement of monuments and statues within highly public spaces such as parks, squares, libraries and government buildings. The content of the art work generally reinforced nationalism. War memorials in the form of bronze statues celebrating a version of history complementary to the image of a nation state as moral subject is one example. In his essay *Public Art as Public Authorship: Jochen Gerz's Future Monument and The Public Bench in Coventry City Centre*, art historian Dr. Jonathan Vickery describes this is an example of a communicative mechanism where a stakeholder (i.e. the state) utilizes public art's capacity for social symbolism. “Social symbolism is the non-artistic signifying function that objects can maintain in a particular context, distinct from any cultural or artistic meanings the work might have”. *(Vickery, 3)* The social symbolism of the war memorial bronze statue for instance would bypass its artistic merits, such as its materiality, its technical process and its aesthetic style. It would instead reinforce an aspiration for a sense of power afforded by a secure and coherent national identity.

By the 1970's municipal public art policy began to initiate partnerships with corporations and private donors. This public/private partnership increased the output of municipal public art to include placement on state-owned and corporate owned property. It also expanded the content range of public art to include innovative and sometimes controversial sculptures and murals. As a result artists had greater opportunities to move their work beyond the gallery or museum and into public settings. Thus municipal public art's capacity for social symbolism expanded to include economic stakeholders such as corporations and private donors, and cultural stakeholders such as artists and art institutions. As such the social symbolism of popular municipal public artworks which have fully integrated into the culture of a city like the *New York City Public Library Lions*, the *St. Louis Gateway Arch*, the *Chicago
Picasso and Cloud Gate served to reinforce civic identity formation (civic pride) by signifying cosmopolitan sophistication and economic power. Moreover, Vickery notes that “on the level of social symbolism the artist as a member of the general public came to embody the freedom of expression accorded to every citizen; signified in socially unrestrained freedom, the artist manifests a vision of creative originality validated by its ability to stimulate (provocatively), and is symbolic of the diversity of culture and of hope for the human capacity for vision and thus cultural or social transformation.” (Vickery, 10)

Social Symbolism and Consultation In Relation to Public Procurement and Placement

According to Daniel Hunting's 2005 essay Public Art Policy: Examining an Emerging Discipline, this public/private partnership now comprises current municipal public art policy and thus requires a public consultation process that takes into account the liberal humanist position of artistic freedom of expression with the interests of the general and broad public. Hunting theorized that municipal public art now exists within a matrix defined by two important functions; 1) Placement, in terms of the physical space that it occupies, and 2) Procurement, in terms of the origin of its existence. (Hunting, 1) This matrix constitutes an axis between art that is privately funded and displayed in areas that are predominately not accessible to the general public (art purchased by individuals or corporations and placed inside office buildings, etc.) to art that is fully funded by tax payer dollars and placed in highly visible locations. An example of art that falls into the middle of this matrix (private origin and partial public placement) would be corporate funded art displayed outside or in common areas such as shopping malls. (Hunting, 2)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private Origin</th>
<th>Private Placement</th>
<th>Partial Public Placement</th>
<th>Public Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-1 Art purchased by individuals or corporations and placed inside office buildings, etc.</td>
<td>A-2 ‘Corporate art’ displayed outside or in common areas such as shopping malls.</td>
<td>A-3 Privately funded art that has been donated to the city and displayed in a park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Public Origin</td>
<td>B-1 Works sponsored by non-profit and charitable organizations on private property.</td>
<td>B-2 Small memorials in street medians and low-traffic areas.</td>
<td>B-3 Public/private partnerships at athletic venues, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Public Origin</td>
<td>C-1 Government funded artwork placed in government offices not generally accessible to the public.</td>
<td>C-2 Government funded artwork placed inside libraries or neighborhood parks.</td>
<td>C-3 Full government funding and prominent, highly visible locations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 1: *Matrix of public art as a function of placement and origin, with some examples*, Daniel Hunting, 2005.

Paradoxically, the interdisciplinary nature of municipal public art which combines the fields of fine art, museum management, art history and public administration served to enrich and yet complicate its process of procurement, placement and public consultation. This complication at times situated municipal public artwork to function on a level of social symbolism, as a source of authority in opposition to the public. Vickery cites this as an example of “when public art will seem imposed on public space and thus be viewed as a cipher for the decision making power of the state, corporate or individual donor interests, or art world institutions”. *(Vickery, 6)*

*Richard Serra’s Tilted Arc (1981-89)* is a notable example of when an innovative and
challenging work of municipal public art is rejected by the broad public not because of its lack of artistic quality, but because its signifying function changes due to the way it is situated in a public space. *Tilted Arc* was a 120 foot long, 12 foot high wall of oxidized steel which bisected Federal Plaza in New York City. As a site specific art object it was intended to alter the perceptual and somatic experience of citizens who engaged with the plaza space. Because it was acquired with public funds and placed on public property it automatically entered into a controversial category. This is because public art of this variety was and still is the most likely to be revered or reviled. According to Hunting the fully exposed placement and full government funding makes these artworks vulnerable to attack if not administered with a comprehensive method of public consultation. (*Hunting, 2*) Hunting notes that as artwork is placed in more highly public spaces, the audience is likely to view it on a much more involuntary level. This can be perceived as an assault on the viewer, and when that assault comes via government funding, people are likely to object to the concept of bureaucrats forcing them into such an encounter with art. (*Hunting, 3*)

Hunting relays that public art which is privately funded and displayed in areas that are usually inaccessible by the broad public is nearly immune to the possibility of controversy and negative public reception. As private and public spending and placement moves towards a greater public involvement so to do opportunities for controversy increase. A sexually explicit Robert Mapplethorpe photograph will elicit very different responses if it is displayed in a ground-floor corporate lobby as opposed to a seldom-used conference room. The same photo might be acceptable if shown in a city museum (especially if it is given proper context as part of a larger exhibition), but would surely invite controversy if it were hung in city council chambers. Hunting indicates that the acquisition and placement of public art follows a similar continuum. Public art that is privately paid for and placed on private property is given quite a bit of leeway by the public. Even if portions of the public do not like the work, resentment toward it is likely to be more muted if public funds were not used to pay for it. Conversely, people are more likely to get fired up over art work that they have financed through the public coffers, especially if they feel it offends their sensibilities and that they had no say in its selection. *(Hunting, 2)*

Hunting says that *Tilted Arc's* eventual de-installation resided in a deficiency of its consultative methodology which failed to fully acknowledge the scope of its interdisciplinary nature (the combined fields of fine art, museum management, art history and public administration). If, according to Hunting a program of definitions and vocabulary had been developed which allowed the public (as acknowledged public patrons i.e. tax payer stakeholders and employees of buildings adjoining the plaza), administrators, and Serra to communicate effectively then perhaps *Tilted Arc* could have succeeded as public art. For Hunting, good art administrators are particularly skilful as public consultants, juggling the language and needs of the artists, construction supervisors and politicians to
manage projects that meet the needs of diverse interest groups. Hunting thus calls for a consultative methodology where the broad public is represented in a way that recognizes their interests and needs while still maintaining public art's socially symbolic capacity to signify the liberal humanist freedom of creative expression (where the artist is free from the dictates of public opinion which can potentially water down their creative vision).

Hunting's sentiment was predated a decade earlier by municipal public art administrators, authors and critics. San Jose public art administrator Jerry Allen declared that the notion of a publicly shared artistic vocabulary had long disappeared. “The civic symbolism of the past (i.e. the bronze hero on the horse) is a language in which the public is no longer fluent”. (Allen, 246) Similarly, critic Kate Linker, in One Place After Another – Site Specific Art and Locational Identity (Miwon Kwon), argued that monumental abstract public sculptures (which had spread widely across the United States by the late 1970’s) sited in public spaces “functioned more like extensions of the museum, advertising individual artists and their accomplishments rather than any genuine gesture toward public engagement”. Linker noted that, despite the physical accessibility, “this type of public art remained resolutely inaccessible insofar as the prevalent style of modernist abstraction remained indecipherable, uninteresting, and meaningless to a general audience”. (Kwon 65)

By the mid 1990's some municipal public art administrators, critics and writers began to seriously foment the idea that the social symbolism of public art signified a source of authority opposed to the public. Author Hilde Hein encapsulated this sentiment when she remarked, “The sheer presence of art out-of-doors or in a bus terminal or hotel reception area does not automatically make that art public – no more than placing a tiger in a barnyard would make it a domestic animal”. (Hein, 4) This disconnect of municipal public art's capacity for social symbolism with the public interest prompted
authors and critics to advocate new and relevant ways for public art to “communicate with the public”. (Knight, viii) Cher Krause Knight's 2008 publication Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism, argues that to best define the function of public art we must first consider the interrelationship between the message of a particular public art project and its audience. For Knight it is most useful to look at whom public art is speaking to and what its message is. (Knight, viii)

According to Knight, in order for this to happen public art must be both intellectually accessible and socially relevant. Critic and author Patricia Phillips best described this as an art form that “only becomes fully public when it takes the idea of public as (its) genesis and (its) subject for analysis. It is public because of the kinds of questions it chooses to ask or address, and not because of its (physical) accessibility or volume of viewers”. (Phillips, 298) Knight concludes that the “publicness” or openness of public art rests ultimately in the quality and impact of its communicative exchanges with its audiences. This would include a public consultative methodology that would rely on its ability to extend reasonable and fair opportunities for members of the public to grasp and negotiate their own relationship with public art. (Knight, ix)

Knight thus theorized a notion of public art through what she terms a “populist” model. This primarily calls for a pluralistic definition of artistic merit, one which promotes public participation in art production, and encourages audiences to have experiential relationships to art based on interactivity and not passive viewership. She differentiates this experiential model by comparing it to what she terms an “elitist” model of art production and audience reception which emphasizes the need for professionalism, formal education in the arts, and institutionalized standards of quality according to established cannons of taste. (Knight, ix) As a community based public art practitioner I look to this “populist” model as part of my working methodology. I however feel that Knight's dichotomized
notion of public art is too reductive. That is to say, I think that public art can represent and communicate with a broad stakeholder-ship in relevant and meaningful ways through a plurality of communicative methodologies and mechanisms depending on the context or purpose of its creation. Certainly the function of public art can encompass more than one imperative.

Knight's “populist” model, which for the purpose of my artist statement, I will define as community based, essentially situates public art as a tool or process to generate modalities of social/communal cohesion and/or to create public discursive spaces. The “elitist” model, as Knight registers it, which I feel is a slightly pejorative term, (and so for the purpose of my artist statement I will refer to as academically inclined) can not only serve to aesthetically (and with that, physically and conceptually) change and challenge public space, but it can serve to publicly raise questions in provocative and/or nuanced ways thus giving way to public discursive space in its own right. It is of course important to remember that public art encompasses a broad and intertwined field in terms of its aesthetic and cultural functionality or purpose. Many public art initiatives seek not to explicitly build community or to intellectually and somatically challenge but may rather seek to beautify or decorate. In this sense it is not unreasonable to situate this field (the aesthetic and cultural function of public art) within a matrix based on community building, site beautification or decoration and academic inclination. Yet, at the fundamental level of this pluralistic approach to engage the broad public in relevant and meaningful ways lies a public consultative process which impacts public art's capacity for social symbolism in varying and selective ways.

Reflecting the Public Interest in Municipal Public Art and in Community Based Public Art

This pluralistic threshold of public art's function has had profound impacts on its policy and on
artists who work with municipalities and small communities. According to Vickery, “In major studies of public art the main issues tend to revolve around cultural policy, social policy and all the criteria that come with the overwhelming ethical mandate that public art must be in the public interest”. (Vickery, 2) Vickery describes this criteria as falling into the cognitive horizon where public art is experienced by the broad public, namely significance, representation and stimulation. Embedded in these conceptions are aesthetic expectations that Vickery characterizes as implicit demands that public art must fulfil such as; 1) the marking of an event of historic or cultural significance, 2) involving the public and creating a sense of community or collective cultural identity, and 3) expressing or harmonizing (aesthetically or thematically) with the character of the location. Vickery notes that municipal public art generally meets this criteria in three ways; 1) by containing recognizable imagery, iconography, or unusual abstraction with some visible connection to a recognized event or person, 2) by involving the community in its creation (i.e. mural project), and 3) by involving shapes, materials or iconography that resonates with the environment or local industry. (Vickery, 6)

This pluralistic threshold of public art's function has had profound impacts on its policy in another way. It is now common practice for municipal public art to engage the broad public in various types of consultation and community outreach strategies. These include seminar and workshop components which intend to seek input, educate and familiarize the broad public with new public art projects, artists and ideas. Furthermore, consultation on public art commissioning now recognizes the requirement for community involvement and development. Community based public art programs have thus been initiated and supported as a legitimate category of municipal public art policy. Although there are many definitions and mandates attributed to community based public art, they typically resonate strongly with the community based model Knight describes. The Canada Council for the arts defines community based public art as “an arts process where professional artists and community
members actively work together as creative partners in collaborative projects. Activities and projects are joint undertakings where the process of collaborating is equally important to the art created, and where there is shared decision-making and ownership of project results”. (Canada Council for the Arts, on line reference: “Guidelines for Integrated Arts Program: Artists and Community Collaboration”)

A prominent feature of community based public art is the collaborative role that the artist plays and the communicative role that the art making process plays. As an artistic collaborator, the artist's creative autonomy and artistic sensibility must be negotiated with a range of stakeholders. Moreover, the artist's role becomes that of a social conduit, as a means to bring individuals and various interest groups together within a framed art project. Often the objective of these projects aim to improve individual and collective socio political or economic circumstances through creative participatory action. (The Northgate Public Art Plan, City of Seattle, 7) In many cases the art making process assumes a greater inter-communal communicative role as it is often used as a tool for stimulating dialogue, for documenting community-rooted narratives and for encouraging communal empowerment. This heightened communicative role means that community based public art is generally “as much about the process as it is about the artistic product or outcome”. (Community Arts Workbook, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Ontario, 1998, p.7)

As the co-creative nature of community based public art permeates fields of community activism, planning and development, its capacity for social symbolism inevitably signifies communal cohesion and localized identity formation. Because community based public art projects are generally smaller in scale than municipal public art projects it does not consist of a broad public but a localized public. The range of stakeholders could include social service agencies, community business improvement areas, community associations, local activists, local interest groups, individuals and
artists. As such Pohanna Pyne Feinberg, coordinator of *Inspire Art*, a Montreal, Quebec based community art research and resource website, suggests that its co-creative nature signifies participatory rather than representational cultural democracy. (*Inspire Art*)

While municipal public art policy aids in the development of community based public art through administrative and granting mechanisms, another highly significant paradigmatic shift has influenced public art's capacity for social symbolism and its communicative methodologies. The “Creative City” is a strategic urban renewal and design concept which champions the use of public art as a means to promote investment and economic development. Urban studies theorist Richard Florida outlined the key mechanism of this strategy as lying in the city itself, which he describes as an economic and social organizing machine. He says that cities “bring people and ideas together, providing the platform for them to combine and recombine in myriad ways, spurring both artistic and cultural creativity and technological innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth”. (*Florida, The Atlantic Cities*) Florida maintains that art and culture play key roles in attracting skilled people, who in turn power innovation, firm formation and economic growth and development. According to Florida large scale community surveys indicate that quality of place and openness are the most highly ranked factors in peoples' satisfaction and emotional attachment to their communities, trumping even job opportunities. He also points to the role of the city as “an entertainment machine”, identifying the directly public role of artistic and cultural scenes. (*Florida, The Atlantic Cities*)

Cities all over the world have embraced the “Creative City” strategy as a paradigm within their urban planning and municipal public art policy. As such many cities have embarked on long term and large scale urban and cultural redevelopment projects. An applicable example would be the ambitious multi-million dollar *City Art and Sustainable Sydney 2030* municipal public art policy.
The “Creative City” objective to use public art as a means to bolster tourism, attract residents and stimulate economic development and growth are clearly articulated in its mandate. (pg. 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 18) It aims to support local community cultural expression through public consultation and engagement thematizing contemporary issues such as affordable housing and global warming. (pg. 13, 49-51) Furthermore, its consultative objective aims to fund community based public art initiatives through the establishment of local art centres and workshops. (pg. 13, 18, 33-35) These public art initiatives have a two-fold imperative of supporting communal empowerment and inter-communal dialogue while strengthening local business development and tourism. The latter of these imperatives has the intended outcome of attracting new residents and businesses into communities and therefore boosting residential and commercial property values. (pg, 33-35)

As seen in the example of the City Art and Sustainable Sydney 2030 municipal public art policy, the “Creative City” strategy of using public art as a tool to promote residential and commercial investment and economic development permeates not only urban development initiatives (large scale
public art that is fully funded by tax payer dollars and placed in highly visible locations) but also localized community initiatives (through the use of community based public art). As a result of this permeation public art's capacity for social symbolism has expanded to signify the commodification of municipal and community historical narratives, identity and knowledge. (Vickery, 6)

A pertinent example of this would be the *Fremont Troll* that Seattle based community development theorist and activist Jim Diers examines in his book *Neighbour; Power Building Community the Seattle Way*. Diers describes an initiative aimed at cleaning up and transforming a section of state-owned property (which had become a magnet for illegal dumping and encampments) located under a bridge beside a newly constructed community park. Community members sought help from the Fremont Arts Council, the group that had given the neighbourhood its reputation for “funky” art. Utilizing the particularities of the location, the Arts Council decided that a large sculpture would most effectively and creatively engage the space and solve the dumping and encampment problem. The consultation process included a call for submissions and an opportunity for the local public to vote for their favourite concept.

![Fig 4: Steve Badanes, Wil Martin, Donna Walter, Ross Whiteread, *Freemont Troll*, 1990.](image)
They choose a giant troll as the art work, which incensed Regina Hackett, the art critic for the Seattle Post (and was admittedly the most aesthetically objectionable choice from Diers own point of view). Because the art work was 80% publicly funded and placed on public property (albeit in a relatively discreet location as encountered by a moderate level of pedestrian and vehicular traffic), Hackett routinely used her news column to question both the democratic process of its selection and its lack of artistic quality and achievement...“If 'the people' want bad art by majority vote, should public money be used to buy it? ..Visual art benefits all, but there is such a thing as being a specialist in making and choosing it. Undemocratic as it sounds, not all opinions are created equal”. (Diers, 70)

Hackett's comments roused the Fremont community to rally behind the troll. When the community failed to convince the Seattle Arts Commission to include the troll in its collection, the community went instead to the Board of Public Works. As a result the Fremont Troll was the first public artwork ever approved by that body. The community also responded to vandalism on the troll by installing lighting under the bridge and setting up a nightly neighbourhood patrol. The community also started a tradition celebrating “Trolloween” occurring every October 31, with a huge procession beginning at the troll. Clearly the social symbolism of this artwork was not opposed to the public but in fact symbolized identity formation through the invention of tradition and through antagonism against civic and art world authorities. The Fremont Troll's measure of success, according to Diers lied in the way it integrated into the social, political and cultural values of the community. However its success was also measured in how it attracted tourists and their money to the community thus signifying the commodification of Fremont's cultural expression and identity. (Diers, 69-71)
As enacted and recognized in the public interest, these measures of success inevitably require different consultative methodologies which can meet the needs and context of a diverse stakeholder horizon. This would include considerations into differences of how the artist consults with stakeholders based on cultural and socio-economic orientations inherent to the public art project.

**Reflecting the Public Interest Through the Art of Listening in Community Based Public Art**

Particular methodological approaches which thematize the consultative process in community based public art have been described and analyzed by art historian Grant Kester. His 2004 book *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art* looks at artists and artist groups who (through community invitation or initiative) work with diverse and sometimes conflicting stakeholder constituencies. These artists/groups endeavour to create consensual solutions to inter-communal social problems. Furthermore, these artist/groups aim to decrease limitations and expand possibilities within boundaries of difference through a consensual recognition of diverse interests and forms of representation. They do this through a performative/event and process based approach which provides contextual mechanisms and apparatus's for communicative interaction. In terms of its platform of procurement, the project's that Kester writes about are funded by a mix of public, private, NGO, and community foundation monies (and sometimes out of the artist/groups own pocket) (*Wilson, 117*).

A common feature of this type of practice entails an extensive and protracted duration of dialogue that the artist facilitates, which may last for months or even years. Kester says this feature is based on a shift from a concept of art centred on self expression to one based on the ethics of communicative exchange. This ultimately creates open ended possibilities of change and transformation within the process of communication that the project initiates. This, according to Kester
encapsulates a more nuanced account of communicative experience which situates the primacy of the public art project as a process of communication rather than a process of object creation. (Kester 90) This coincides with his analysis of these work's relevant legacy to modernist art which is “found in the ways in which aesthetic experience can challenge conventional perceptions and systems of knowledge”. (Kester, 118)

Kester terms this the 'empathetic ethic' of community based public art and describes its encapsulation as a movement by artists “who begin their work not with the desire to express or articulate an already formed creative vision, but rather to listen”. (Kester, 118) His sentiment and those of the artists he writes about is reinforced by philosopher Gemma Corradi Fumara who argues that Western Philosophy and art must, rather than concentrate on assertive saying, begin to acknowledge the role of listening as a creative process. (Kester, 106) He maintains that the art or the aesthetic is found within the prolonged and nuanced dialogical engagement inherent to each project. This is due largely to the fact that projects of this variety often continue long after their initial inception as further iterations which produce new networks, programs, workshops and communities.

Kester's evaluative schemata looks into the interstices of the aesthetic, the ethical and the tactical. (Wilson, 112) The ethical would thus include how the artist creates fair and equal communicative and/or dialogical mechanisms predicated on Fumara's ethos of listening. This would take into serious account that stakeholders within a given project communicate differently due to their cultural and socio-economic background. The tactical would examine how the communicative/dialogical mechanisms were carried out logistically. Projects of this variety frequently use the workshop as a way to frame creative labour, or they involve the tactical mobilization of craft traditions. (Wilson, 112) Beyond the nuanced aesthetic inherent to the dialogical engagement that
Kester valorizes, the aesthetic would include modes of interaction that the project creates (i.e. does it open further dialogue between various community members, does it create new solutions to existing problems, does it create new spaces of sociability etc.).

An example of Kester's evaluative schemata can be found in the first chapter of *Conversation Pieces* where he examines a community based public art project called *West Meets East* (1992) by Loraine Leeson. For nearly twenty years Leeson had developed collaborative projects with community groups, schools and women's organizations in the Docklands and East London (England). In the case of the *West Meets East* project, Leeson initiated a consultative listening methodology as a series of dialogues which asked young women at the Bow School to concentrate on their common experiences in living between two cultures. Leeson created fair and equal communicative and dialogical mechanisms for the student collaborators, most of whom were recent immigrants and spoke little English. She did this by utilizing a process of visual communication to develop the project. As a result

the young women were asked to explore their ideas about cultural difference through the creation and juxtaposition of images, objects and words (in Bengali and English) in a series of exercises.

The utilization of newly formed knowledge gained from the series of dialogues into an art-making process resulted in a series of workshops focusing on textile production and the re-articulation of Henna design. This is an example of the tactical mobilization of craft traditions as reflected in the students connection with Bengali cultural traditions and the local economy, which relies on small garment factories where many of their family members work. In terms of its aesthetic modality, *West Meets East* was manifest as a twelve-by-sixteen-foot textile photographic montage displayed as a billboard photomural on the Isle of Dogs (London, England). The image they developed to communicate their experiences and concerns features a Bengali girl joining a denim jacket to a sari with an industrial sewing machine. The experience of living between two cultures suggested by the juxtaposition of the jean jacket and the sari is reiterated throughout the image. The hands of the young woman in the image are painted with traditional Bengali Henna patterns associated with marriage ceremonies, but they have been applied with nail polish. A series of iconic images fill a decorative border around the image containing a MacDonald's and a Coca-Cola logo, and soccer players with scenes from village life in Bangladesh drawn from the students memories. The young woman's identity is thus poised between the influences of Western and Bengali culture. *(Kester, 23)*

Kester notes that the image by passes a simplistic opposition between two cultures and suggests a complex process in which identity is defined or performed by referencing past rituals and traditions, the experience of daily work, and the influences of contemporary consumer culture. Furthermore, Kester relates that the students endeavoured to challenge recent efforts to encourage the Creative City strategic imperative of cultural tourism in their community based on a presupposed image
of an exotic 'Banglatown' by foregrounding their own hybrid Englishness. *(Kester 23)* According to Kester, the production of the billboard photomural served as a catalyst for collaborative interactions thematizing cultural identity, with a particular focus on the question of what it means to be foreign. This was timely because ant-immigrant violence and racial tension were noticeable within the community as affirmed by several acts of vandalism of the billboard. *(Kester 23)*

However, Kester notes that the billboard also served as a catalyst for collaborative interactions involving aesthetic and compositional questions, and cultural politics. This is because the billboard was placed in the same working class district in the Docklands not far from Rachel Whiteread's *House* *(1993-94)*, which was a municipal public art initiative commissioned by the organization ArtAngel Trust. Kester uses this example to illustrate how an academically inclined model differs from a community based model within a similar site and community. I feel that it is also important to consider the function of these two models of public art relevant to Kester's example. The function of Leeson's *West Meets East* served to primarily build community within the Bangladesh community through initiatives predicated on cultural/communal cohesion, and inter-communal interaction. This endeavour included mechanisms to generate a broader cultural platform of representation. The function of this project also served to generate inner-communal and inter-communal dialogues encompassing topics of cultural identity and what it means to be foreign. As public art, *House* functioned to challenge and bring to light notions of collective and private memory as lived and historical experience. Art critic Andrew Graham Dixon described *House* as a “sculpture that memorializes, in its transfiguration of an ordinary person's home, the ordinary lives of ordinary people (ordinariness, it suggests, is one thing we all have in common). House is stubbornly un-heroic and democratic. Whiteread has made an image of how we all live, caught between solitude and sociability, out of the separate but abutting cells of the rooms in a house in London E3”. *(Dixon, The Independent)*
House was a poured concrete cast of an interior space of an Edwardian terrace house in the Bow neighbourhood of one of London's poorest boroughs. The original house had been scheduled for demolition as part of an effort to gentrify the Bow neighbourhood. The pouring technique Whiteread used was influenced by her gallery based sculptural works in which she explored the significance of negative and positive space by casting room interiors. Whiteread's casting process registered the surface and volumes of the Edwardian house in exacting detail and as such enacted the sensibility of a three dimensional photograph which linked its concrete ghost like monumentality to both a familiar and absent resonance. Kester notes that the concept of House was based on an academically inclined model of public art, which utilized aesthetic, spatial and conceptual tactics of provocation, ambiguity and open ended interpretations of constructed social-time spaces. (Kester 18)

![Image](image_url)


However, because it was placed in a highly public setting and was procured from public monies it automatically entered into a highly contentious territory in which Hunting outlined. (It is
worthy to note that Leeson's project was not placed in such a highly comparative public setting and was procured from much lower level of public monies). Not surprisingly some people within the community of its placement dismissed *House* as complete nonsense or resented its mausoleum associations. Yet, others within the community of its placement embraced it for the attention it brought to the neighbourhood as a potential economic/tourist development implementation tool. Art critics and citizens within the art community however, embraced it as a great work of art in its own right. *(Kester 18)*

Although *House* achieved a high standard of excellence in terms of its conceptual and technical imperative as an art object (Whiteread was selected as the winner of the Turner Art Prize for *House*) it was perceived to function on a level of social symbolism in opposition to the public, signifying a cipher for the decision making powers of municipal and art-world institutions. As such *House* was voted by Bow Neighbourhood councillors to be demolished in January 1994. According to James Lingwood of the commissioning body of ArtAngel Trust, “*House* did not seek to manufacture some confectionary consensus, as many public works of art are compelled to do, indeed it laid bare the limits of language and expectation which afflict the contentious arena of public art”. *(Kester, 19)* Lingwood's comments can be understood in the rationale of the artist as a member of the general public, and on the level of social symbolism embodying freedom of expression, unrestrained creative vision and originality. This duality within the capacity for social symbolism in public art has lead critics to propose that successful public art is intrinsically different from 'art-world' or gallery/museum based art. Critic Patricia Phillips suggest that “it is possible if not common place, that what resonates as public art may unquestionably fail as 'art', and good art may disappoint and fail as public art”. *(Phillips, 4)*

The disappointment and failure of *House* (as public art within its context of procurement and
placement) as signified by its demolition may have been attributed to its consultative process. Kester notes that there was no consensus among the residents and local councillors as to the meaning of the art object. *House* provoked a heated dialogue and debate in the British press, but most of the attention focused on the work itself such as its cost and its relevance to contemporary art theory. Moreover, the conditions of housing and community life in the Bow Neighbourhood served mainly as a political backdrop against which to measure the work's symbolic relevance. *House* functioned as a reminder of the community once defined in Bow by the physical and symbolic space of the home now fragmented by unemployment, poverty and gentrification. Kester surmises that this rhetoric of loss and absence complimented Whiteread's working method in which *House* was conceptualized without any direct interaction with the neighbourhood's residents. *(Kester, 21)*

**Engaging the Public Interest Through a Pluralistic Approach**

Kester examined *House* and *West Meets East* in order to articulate two different approaches to creating public art, notably the academically inclined and the community based. Ultimately he focused on the consultative process of each approach. For Whiteread the object came first, as the idea of physically enlarging one of her gallery-specific sculptures and locating it in public space. According to Kester the exact location was secondary as Whiteread had considered terrace houses in North and East London and Islington before the Bow site became available. Thus her choice of placement had little to do with the specific conditions of Bow or the concerns of its residents, and was more or less a site where she could deploy her a priori idea. There was no public consultative process as this could have been seen to stymie or water down Whiteread's creative vision, which was an important social value of the particular commissioning body.
For Loraine Leeson, the starting point for her project was a series of dialogues with the community in which the work was produced. The particular idea, object, image or experience emerged from the series of dialogues. Kester notes that Leeson attempted to learn as much as possible about the cultural and political histories of the students with whom she worked, as well as their particular needs and skills. Leeson's artistic identity (and the artist/groups that Kester writes about in *Conversation Pieces*) is based in part by her capacity to listen, openly and actively, and to organize scenarios that maximize the collective creative potential of a given constituency or site. As such Leeson defines herself less as an object maker than a facilitator of shared visions. *(Kester, 24)*

As a community based public art practitioner I feel that *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art* is instructive because it provides an index of community based practitioners along with a range of community based public art projects. Kester's book also comprehensively details working methodologies and communicative philosophies utilized by these practitioners. As his book is both highly informative and well researched I do however find that it impinges on a reductive and reactionary model of analysis.

For instance, his comparison between *West Meets East* and *House* essentially keys in on its difference between consultative methodologies without acknowledging in a more considered and in-depth way, the differences of the function of these public art objects. Kester also does not bring to light that these public art objects existed on extreme ends of the placement and procurement matrix that Daniel Hunting outlined. *(Hunting, 2)* Therefore these public art objects were subject to different sets of public engagement, evaluation and response. Moreover, on the level of social symbolism, both art objects capacity for such differentiated widely and could have been considered comparatively, relative to variables and relations between consultative methodology, stakeholder-ship interest and economic
As such, throughout his entire book, and subsequent interviews (Mick Wilson, “Autonomy, Agonism, and Activist Art: An Interview With Grant Kester. in Art Journal. Vol. 66: 107-118. 2007) Kester describes and analyzes numerous community based public art projects through the lens of an academically inclined methodology and vice versa. Within this Kester's tone and rhetorical delivery maintains a considerable agonistic sensibility, which is ironic because the artists he writes about take a methodological approach of active listening. (Kester, 113) Much like Cher Krause Knight, Kester's description and analysis is based off a principle of dichotomy and not plurality.

I feel that it is much more useful to acknowledge that public art's aesthetic and cultural function exists within a matrix constituting an axis defined by community building, site beautification or decoration and academic inclination. This axis is not absolutely rigid and compartmentalized but rather polymorphic as public art can certainly function to achieve one or more of these categorical imperatives. Due to this integrative horizon I feel that it is important to note that aesthetic and conceptual imperatives from academically inclined public art often inform the community based variety (most notably within its aesthetic and its tactical deployment). The artists who Kester analyzes in his book all utilize in varying degrees tactics and strategies formulated within the art world or the art institution. It can be said that the artists who Kester describes and to certain degree, community based artists in general (and certainly myself), in the words of Vickery “do not necessarily work within designated spaces of art institutions, but through them and around them, creating discursive spaces within which conceptions and expectations are talked through in everyday language, not institution-specific aesthetic terminology”. (Vickery, 8)
For instance Leeson's *West Meets East*, as a textile photomontage displayed as a billboard photomural utilized similar aesthetic and tactical deployment strategies employed by Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled* (1991). *Untitled* (1991) originated as a black and white photograph of an empty bed with two pillows, a sheet and a top sheet. The photograph is a memorial to his lover, Ross who died of AIDS in 1991. This work was exhibited as a photo mural at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and was simultaneously displayed on twenty-four billboards throughout New York City. Its function served to challenge dominant representations of AIDS circa 1990 and their conflation with homosexuality. It was displayed within a traditional space of advertising, but it was not attempting to sell any particular product which is the normal function of such an apparatus. Moreover, there was not a text or caption which would ground the image and help the viewer read it.

![Fig 7: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (1991)*, 1991.](image)

However, the recognition or non-recognition of the image as a work of art did not preclude it from actively producing meaning in conjunction with its spectators. Gonzales-Torres's tactical usage of
a non-advertising image as a billboard served to disrupt or interrupt its urban context and the experience of the viewer in order to challenge and counter dominant representations of the disease which had been paradigmatic since its emergence in the early 1980's. The representational paradigm of AIDS consisted (in the early period of the epidemic) of images of gay men as helpless victims whose bodies exhibited markers of the illness. Within the image of Untitled, the depressions in the pillows signal that any individual or individuals could occupy this bed and hence be affected by the disease.

Leeson's West Meets East, utilized a photomural aesthetic similar to Gonzalez-Torres's Untitled (1991) in a particularly significant way. West Meets East featured a large scale photograph of a closely cropped image of culturally re-articulated Henna decorated hands (of what appears to be a of a young Bengali woman), a sewing machine, a denim jacket and a sari. Untitled (1991) featured a large scale photograph of a closely cropped black and white photograph of an empty bed. As with Gonzalez-Torres, Leeson chose not to picture the body, but instead signify the body as a cultural and political construction rather than a biological, natural and most importantly, neutral entity. As a tactical deployment strategy West Meets East operated in the same way as Untitled (1991) in that it situated its message or production of meaning (as an art object) within an advertising apparatus as a strategic means to display the work and interrupt its urban context and the experience of the viewer in order to challenge preconceived notions, bring to light issues, and generate dialogue.

Untitled (1991) was certainly more complex in its deployment due to its placement in twenty four locations. As an image it is also more complex. Because there is no text, its meaning is not overtly apparent. Certainly the bed produces an endless chain of signified’s (bed as a space of rest, sleep, birth, consolation, sexual pleasure, sickness etc) which are not limited in any way by the visual structure of the photograph itself. Besides the depressions in the two pillows which indicate a prior presence of two
bodies, nothing in the photograph's signifiers direct or restrict the meaning spectators can construct from it. This of course creates an open ended range of interpretation that the viewer must negotiate, if indeed the viewer chooses to. Moreover, due to this open ended or interpretive range the viewer can in fact come up with multiple meanings in a heuristic manner, possibly gaining a measure of enlightenment and/or critical thinking about the discourse of AIDS and its conflated representation of homosexuality within the process.

This is not to say that community based public art must bypass institution-specific aesthetic terminology in order to engage the public in meaningful, accessible and relevant ways. Similarly this is not to say that municipal public art that is academically inclined always necessitates a complex intellectual and experiential negotiation process that is divorced from an interactive consultative methodology. There are many practitioners who in fact bring an academically inclined, urban beautification and community building approach to public art. A significant example of such a practitioner is Ron Benner because he takes a highly pluralistic approach to the aesthetic and cultural function of public art. Moreover he utilizes a uniquely performative consultative methodology to engage the public.

Benner’s practice is both multifaceted and cross disciplinary. He consults and collects books on themes such as agriculture, bio-engineering, capitalism, colonialism, history, geography and politics which in equal parts inform his practice. His interests have shaped a unique body of garden installations comprised of plants, photographs and textual elements that question and critique industrial agriculture, embedded anthropology, Eurocentric knowledge and the global economy. (Townsend, 11) These installations essentially bring to light lost or obscured colonial narratives. As such links can be seen between Benner's garden installations and the enclosure of common lands which transformed
agricultural production in 17th century England. These enclosures involved the fencing of common lands in order to concentrate agricultural production which inevitably displaced peasant families who had traditionally supplemented other means of income by using these areas to graze their livestock, grow or gather food. This process was often accompanied by force and resistance which eventually resulted in an exodus both to the cities, and to colonies abroad. This, according to curator Melanie Townsend, turned the “oppressed into oppressors, (and the) displaced into displacers, as these immigrants settled land in the Americas. (Townsend, 13)

In a text documenting Benner's many garden installation projects titled Gardens of a Colonial Present: Ron Benner, Townsend notes that within literary tradition the garden is a symbol of both paradise and paradise lost. Cast out of Eden, Adam and Eve were subject to labour in order to render the land fruitful, transforming an untamed into a cultivated territory. Thus the metaphorical walled garden (reminded as the historical enclosure) prevalent within this literary tradition sets up a series of oppositional dichotomies: nature and culture; indigenous and imported; wild and domestic; weed and flower; inclusion and exclusion. (Townsend, 13) Townsend says that these dichotomies are called into question in Benner's garden works, which function as reminders of migration both human and plant. As European colonists migrated to the Americas, indigenous plants and crops, most notably corn or maize (along with natural resources and precious minerals) were shipped back to Western Europe and subsequently disseminated and traded through out Africa and Asia. She identifies Benner's installations as “counter sites” (Townsend, 14), in which the utopian notion of originality is both represented through indigenous plant material and through their location and representation (through image and/or text.) According to Townsend his works extend beyond simplistic notions of hybridity, which seem to suggest something pure originated beforehand. Rather Benner suggests that things, plants and species have always been mixed up. It is merely their history that has been obscured. Thus Benner's work functions to acknowledge and recognize the coexistence of these multiple narratives. (Townsend, 14)
Much like the artists whom Kester writes about in *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Benner embarks on programs of comprehensive and protractive research. This research primarily tracks Native American plant and crop historical and contemporary dissemination, and has included deeply engaged investigative travels to farms and local food markets in Mexico, South America, South Africa, South-East Asia, India and China. This has enabled him to facilitate a series of garden installations in which Benner's plant materials bring to light indigenous American knowledge and their enduring importance. As such many of his installations exhibit indigenous South American species amongst North American garden locales in an endeavour to signify them as both persistent and resistant symbols to the bio-engineering, factory farming and the multinational control of global agricultural practices that mark the forces of what Benner terms “economic colonialism” that is active today. *(Townsend, 15)*

Benner's research based process strongly informs the content and construction of his garden installations. In *Corn Vectors*, large black and white photographs of places he visited maps out the dissemination of corn. In an interview with Benner, Barbara Fischer notes that he practiced a type of research methodology defined within an academic setting. Indeed most of Benner's garden installations take place at University's. *Corn Vectors* (1997) was developed in the context of the University and utilized what Fischer describes as an artistic tactic of intervention.

Installed at the University of Western Ontario, *Corn Vectors* entailed a specific insertion of Native American agriculture into a specifically manicured, European, Anglo-Oxford style campus, and its fraught relation to local and First Nations culture. *(Fisher, 105)*
In many ways *Corn Vectors* is indicative of Benner's oeuvre in that he brings together politics, mapping and foodstuffs within a discipline of cultural geography. He describes his garden installations as large scale research stations which show, in a photo-documentary and museological fashion, his research journeys. For Benner this format “is an attempt at letting the objects speak, or letting the information speak for itself, and by putting it altogether to create a dialogue that can happen between an object and another object, or an object and a written text or a photograph, so that, hopefully, as a viewer you can also become part of the dialogue”. *(Fisher, 113)* Fisher ties Benner's research and documentary photographic practice to the legacy of conceptualism. For his part, Benner notes that Hans Haacke's body of work, which was explicitly concerned with political issues, had a significant influence on him.

Benner's projects are often of an extended duration, lasting several years. Because his garden installations require maintenance (weeding, watering, digging, planting), Benner utilizes this activity to as a means of public consultation and engagement. In an art context, this could be seen as a performative gesture. According to Benner, this performative gesture enables conversations which generate questions or comments from the public. Another significant performative gesture and method
of public consultation and engagement which Benner uses as a means to build community and educate is his public corn roasts. He utilized the public corn roast as an accompanying event to *Corn Vectors* in order to generate public discussion and dialogue about the meaning and purpose of the work. Presently, Benner performs an annual corn roast in conjunction with his Garden Installation *As The Crow Flies* (2005) at Museum London in London Ontario. Because this is an annual event, and has thus had time to accrue public meaning, his public corn roasts at the Museum London builds community through a socially symbolic signifier of tradition or ceremony predicated on the most basic of human commonalities, that of eating and gathering (both the gathering of food and the gathering of community members). Thus Benner's performative consultative gestures ultimately enable his work, which is highly political, academically based and embedded within the artistic legacy of conceptualism, to be much more accessible and approachable. This is of course encompassed in a public art object which also inevitably functions to beautify its surroundings through the beauty of nature.

Fig 9: Ron Benner hosting a corn roast as a performative and consultative gesture.
**Conclusion**

My artist statement functions to frame a comprehensive understanding and evaluative criteria of public art in relation to my interests, experiences and practice as a community based public artist. This has lead me to examine particular relationships rooted primarily in public art's communicative potential. Public art, whether it be categorized as municipal or community based, entails three primary aesthetic and cultural functions. It can function to build community, beautify and decorate urban environments, and intellectually and somatically challenge conventional perceptions and systems of knowledge in nuanced and provocative ways. In varying degrees all public art objects and images fulfill these three functions.

This is because civic and communal cohesion and identity formation is both conscientiously utilized and/or derivatively perceived and formulated within stakeholder interaction and role expectation indicative to public art's capacity for social symbolism. In this sense the social symbolic capacity of public art can either signify values of public interest or public opposition. In both cases this fomentation builds community predicated on positions of acceptance or resistance. Furthermore, public art's placement and procurement factors into this stakeholder interaction and role expectation. This is because the socially symbolic function of public art includes what Vickery terms, a capacity for public response. That is, public is not about art so much as the public capacity for response to art. It uses the response facility art maintains in public spaces in order to register the presence of the public in public space. In doing this it does not represent the public but symbolically mediates the difference between; a) What the public is, as a socially defined mass. And, b) Who the public are as interrelated individuals, each with their own history and identity, yet still part of a mass public. (Vickery, 9)
For example, *Titled Arc* built micro-communities of its supporters and those who opposed it. These communities were enacted through a public discourse that *Titled Arc* created as an art object in and of itself and as the centre of a social debate regarding its removal. The same can be said for *House*, as it too created micro communities of those who valued its ability to draw tourism and economic development into the community. It created micro-communities of those who opposed it and sought its removal and created micro-communities of those who valued it as a complex and sophisticated art object. These communities were enacted and maintained through discursive spaces that *House* created. Furthermore, *Untitled (1991)* functioned to generate a much needed discursive space for the Gay community to address and change dominant representations of AIDS and its conflation with homosexuality. This community building function from the above three public artworks were undoubtedly attributed to their provocative quality and high level of formal complexity. Moreover, contemporary municipal public art policy seeks to build community on a large civic scale and on a small communal scale by embracing the Creative City strategy. This strategy essentially situates public art as a means to attract new residents, tourists and investors to create economic development and improve quality of life. This is primarily achieved in three ways; 1) by containing recognizable imagery, iconography, or unusual abstraction with some visible connection to a recognized event or person, 2) by involving the community in its creation (i.e. mural project), and 3) by involving shapes, materials or iconography that resonates with the environment or local industry.

While not achieving the same level of provocation or artistic complexity the *Freemont Troll* and *West Meets East* certainly beautified or decorated their surroundings in distinctive ways. However, in both cases the artistic and public consultative roles were co-creative. Furthermore, the artwork served to function as a tool and process to build community. The creation of the *Freemont Troll* sought to solve an environmental deficiency within the community. It functioned to build community through its
creation, but continues to build community through its maintenance, its cultural tradition of “Trolloween” and through tourist dollars that it brings into the community. Loraine Leeson took on a co-creative artist and consultative role in *West Meets East* as a means to build community through inner-community and inter-community dialogues. The production of the billboard photomural served as a catalyst for collaborative interactions thematizing cultural identity, with a particular focus on the question of what it means to be foreign which was timely because ant-immigrant violence and racial tension were noticeable within the community. Moreover the student's involved in the making of the artwork endeavoured to challenge the Creative City strategic imperative of cultural tourism in their community based on a presupposed image of an exotic 'Banglatown' by foregrounding their own hybrid Englishness.

The procurement and placement of public art along with its aesthetic and cultural function determines the range and role of the stakeholders which thus shape its public consultation process and its capacity for social symbolism. The social symbolic function of public art can thus allow the public to respond in many ways such as the formulation of communities as enacted and maintained by spaces of discourse. Understanding and thinking about the socially symbolic function of public art thus, in the words of Patricia Phillips, “takes the idea of public as (its) genesis and (its) subject for analysis.” *(Phillips, 298)* Because there is a pluralistic and overlapping approach to this, it should be thought about and analyzed in a pluralistic way. Certainly it is instructive to compare and contrast these approaches as Kester and Knight do. But its important to note that these approaches are also subject to different sets of public engagement, evaluation and response. As a community based artist it is within my best interest and within the best interest of my fellow stakeholders to be cognizant of this. This will ensure that I can maintain a practice that is knowledgeable, relevant, engaging and open-minded.
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Chapter 2

Case Study – Jochen Gerz, The Future Monument and The Public Bench

Introduction

Jochen Gerz's commissioned project *Future Monument* and *Public Bench* (1999-2003) in Coventry, England, provides a highly instructive example of how communicative methodologies of public consultation shape public art's capacity for social symbolism. Public art's socially symbolic function signifies social values, forces or aspirations that have little to do with the intrinsic artistic qualities or meaning of the art object. Municipal public art policy utilizes public art's capacity for social symbolism to advance imperatives such as national, civic and communal identity formation, as well as tourism and economic development. Municipal public art's capacity for social symbolism is also paradoxically dualistic. It can signify the liberalist freedom of artistic expression within the public interest or signify authoritative concepts opposed to the public.

What makes this example so pertinent lies in the context of this project. Gerz, an artist of international renown, took a community based consultative approach to a large scale municipal public art initiative. This approach inextricably led to a co-creative artistic process where the public had an equal say in the significance and meaning of the artworks. Gerz's social connection to Coventry's historical narrative, along with his community based consultative and co-creative approach, served to utilize the *Future Monument's* and the *Public Bench's* capacity for social symbolism to address Britain's colonial history, Coventry's Second World War past and contemporary multicultural condition.
Gerz's commission was one part of a massive urban regeneration project dubbed *The Phoenix Initiative*, which sought to revitalize a run down area of town renamed *Millennium Place*. The project aimed to fulfil strategic objectives indicative to “Creative City” strategy through themes of reconciliation (of Coventry's Second World War past) and revitalization (of its current economic and cultural condition). Coventry City Council conceptualized and marketed these motifs through a campaign of “the shock of the new”, which thematized Coventry as a “City of the Future”. *(Wilson, 1)* Gerz thus chose two different and perhaps paradoxical public art concepts; that of the monument (how can the future be monumentalized?) and the bench (to what extent can its function as a place of social congregation and spectatorship bridge the past with the present?), as ciphers for public co-creation and interlocution.

In *A Stranger with Secrets: Jochen Gerz, Future Monument, Public Bench*, Sarah Wilson points to the deep links that Gerz's project has with Coventry's role as a “site of memory”. As England's first bombed city, Coventry registers within an international network of sites (such as Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki) marked by the dialectic between ruin and pain, reconstruction and reconciliation. *(Wilson, 1)* This dialectic is familiar to Gerz, who Wilson describes as a “child of the rubble”, due to his early childhood experiences traversing the bombed out citiescape of Berlin. For Gerz, Coventry, with its heritage of bombing and reconstruction, has always been the most German of English cities and represents, in his own words, a “defeated place in a victorious country”. *(Wilson, 1)* It is within this context of reconciliation, possibility and regeneration that Gerz, through his co-creative and consultative process, sought to symbolize transnational, localized and personal histories of Coventry as a site of memory.
Defining the Public Interest

In his essay *Public Art as Public Authorship: Jochen Gerz's Future Monument and The Public Bench in Coventry City Centre*, art historian Dr. Jonathan Vickery examines the relationship between the public (as a range of stakeholders) and art in public space. A stakeholder is a person or a group who has a vested interest in utilizing public art's capacity for social symbolism in order to advance imperatives and values that are in their best interest. In the realm of municipal public art the general public is composed of a public commissioning body, corporations, small business, cultural institutions, special interest community organizations and groups, private donors and artists. A broad public could be said to encompass a silent stakeholder-ship because their interests and needs are represented by municipal, community or cultural institutions of the general public.

Vickery describes recent cultural and social policy studies acknowledging municipal public art's ethical mandate to represent the public interest. Yet, as Vickery writes, defining the public interest is not easy, and not something that preoccupies the mind of the artist so much as the commissioning body. Most municipal public art ventures revolve around the making of a single object, perhaps utilizing the construction process as a form of education or social interaction. *(Vickery, 2)* Quite often, consultation is only used to elicit a sense of acceptance or rejection, rather than contribute to the process by which a work of art is conceived, constructed and installed. *(Vickery, 3)* Furthermore, the commissioning body will not often attempt to define the public interest conceptually, and then convey this to the artist. Instead it will attempt to acknowledge the public interest through some kind of mechanism of consultation. These, according to Vickery respond to general conceptions that are already part of political discourse of class, economics, ethnic identity and cultural education. *(Vickery, 4)*
Vickery suggests that this is problematic because the process of defining the public interest becomes wholly separate from the creative process involved in making a municipal public art object.

While public consultation has become an important part of municipal public art policy, it is carried out by representation. An administrative committee, for example is often set up to consult with the general public, entailing local associations and councillors, who avail the commissioning body of their expertise. According to Vickery a consensus or part consensus is often made without further extensive broad public consultation. This is due to the high cost involving advertising and public information mechanisms like surveys or questionnaires which may not even ascertain an accurate sense of representation. (Wright, 649) Furthermore, the very process of broad consultation usually invites unnecessary or even irrational opposition. This is because a highly visible consultation process can situate the art work as a vehicle for a socially symbolic protest against local authorities or the art world. As a result the art work's powers of aesthetic signification can be overridden by social signification, producing meanings that may have little to do with the actual work in question. (Vickery, 8) Vickery also notes that high profile public art project's such as the Phoenix Initiative often combine consultation with public relations strategies. As the commissioning body is usually a public body, like a City Council, the consultation process becomes a politically motivated act of public relations. This is because public bodies like a City Council usually understand more acutely than other stakeholders the way public art becomes socially symbolic. For example, a high profile public art project will become inseparable from their perpetual need to maintain their own corporate profile as a convincing self-presentation of themselves as “in the public interest”. (Vickery, 9)

Vickery identifies this as a further problematic because it initiates a disjuncture or lack of contiguity between the consultation process (including the PR that commissioning bodies conduct), the
artistic tastes of the broad public, and the artistic process of producing a particular genre or style of artwork. Often a commissioning body will dissolve this problem and uphold that the unfettered creativity of the artist is, by its nature, in the public interest. This is reasoned as a matter of social provision for free creative expression inculcated by a political principle most would consider intrinsic to the historical concept of democracy. Conversely, a commissioning body will often opt for a safer solution by requesting familiar civic symbolism, or established styles and materials that resonate directly with the work's urban or civic context. This aims to invoke acceptance through the affirmation of an already extant consensus on some idea or principle. *(Vickery, 3)*

**The emergence of the Public Interest Through Social Dialogue**

Gerz on the other hand, conceived the stakeholder relationship between the administrative/commissioning body, the public (which would include the broad public as represented by the general public) and the artist in a different way. He did this by first choosing two conventional public art forms which distinctly resonated with the overall theme and design concept designated by Coventry City Council. 1; The obelisk monument, as a form loaded with historical resonance, relevant to themes addressed such as origins, conflict, identity and history. 2; The bench, as a site of social congregation and spectatorship as well as an architectural addition to the outer rim of an open square adjacent to the monument. Vickery notes that both of these forms are artistically non distinctive because their public perception precludes an exclusive act of creative expression on the part of an individual artist. *(Vickery, 3)* Undoubtedly this was a very conscientious decision on the part of Gerz. The more expressive the artwork, the more it signifies the personality of the artist and thus (even if subliminally) detracts from its public objective, which for Gerz, was the framing of social dialogue. He
thus utilized the concept and form of the monument and the bench as a means to catalyze dialogue pertaining to Britain's colonial history, Coventry's Second World War past and present multicultural condition.

Vickery describes three ways in which the obelisk monument acts as such a catalyst. First, it is a trans-cultural art form as Eastern as it is Western. This is because it was imported and re-imported to the West by conquest, from the Romans to Napoleon. Thus its internationalism is embedded with the politics of colonialism and issues of neo-colonialism. These meanings signify the way Coventry's waves of immigrants were brought in by these two historic forces. Second, the monument exhibits no individual artistic expression or signature style. Rather than a land-mark sculpture, it is part of a matrix of visual forms that make up the architectural complex of Millennium Place. Moreover, the obelisk monument in ancient times was a vehicle for collective meanings and not individual expression. Suitably, the Future Monument promotes a sense of collective ownership. Third, obelisks have traditionally been used as war memorials which contain a certain visual logic. Its capacity for social symbolism entails a representative authority signifying state power or military prowess. As such, it signifies an incontestable knowledge of history; as a morally sanctioned version of historical events significant to the formation of the nation or state. The obelisk also functioned as a memorial whose meaning was activated by inscriptions to the heroic dead. Yet, after World War Two, and then after the fall of Eastern European communism in the 1990s, the classical types of monument form have largely been rejected by democratic governments. This rejection, according to Vickery, has itself been a socially symbolic rejection of demagogy and totalitarianism as routes to political transformation.

(Vickery, 4)

Vickery says that although the Phoenix Initiative commissioned many artists, Gerz's project
stood out because it involved a significant degree of reflection and analysis of the current cultural function, aesthetic meaning and social symbolism of public art. *(Vickery, 1)* This was demonstrated by his utilization of the monument and bench as a means to catalyze public dialogue and was realized through a consultative methodology of facilitated dialogue similar to the variety described by Grant Kester in *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art*. This methodology, which is commonly utilized in community based public art, entails an extensive and protracted temporal duration which could last for months or years. It is based on a shift of from a concept of art centred on self expression to one based on the ethics of communicative exchange. The goal of this methodology is to create open ended possibilities of change and transformation within the process of communication that the project initiates. According to Kester this encapsulates a more nuanced account of communicative experience which situates the public art project as a process of communication rather than a process of object creation. *(Kester 90)*

Kester describes this process of communicative experience within an 'empathetic ethic' of community based public art consultation utilized by artists “who begin their work not with the desire to express or articulate an already formed creative vision, but rather to listen”. *(Kester, 118)* This 'empathetic ethic' formed the foundation of Gerz's consultative process. For four years Gerz was actively involved in public negotiation, consultation and community based research in Coventry. Wilson says “he laughed and joked with the lofty and the most ordinary townspeople”. *(Wilson, 3)* He embarked on a series of seminars and informal meetings with commissioning bodies, business owners, community associations, clubs and historians. He involved students from Coventry’s institute of art and design to liaise with these groups and with individuals, recording their responses, often in the form of their own conceptions of art, articulating their own cultural history and even personal life story. *(Vickery, 8)* Gerz also maintained consistent media coverage over the stages of commissioning,
research, artwork design and construction and was therefore able to thematize his meetings, lectures and research. This was done in order to relay his collected information (as a form of collective knowledge production) to the public of Coventry in a transparent and easily accessible manner.

As such the *Future Monument* and the *Public Bench* became in the words of Vickery, “not (only) art objects but, research products, vehicles of social inquiry, and the fulcrum of subsequent debate concerning the nature of the general public of Coventry, their specific history, identity and social ideals”. *(Vickery, 2)* This sentiment reflects the “populist” model of public art that Cher Krause Knight and Patricia Phillips advocate; accordingly, as an intellectually accessible and socially relevant art form that “only becomes fully public when it takes the idea of public as (its) genesis and (its) subject for analysis (and) because of the kinds of questions it chooses to ask or address”. *(Phillips, 298)*

While coinciding with Coventry City Council's marketing stratagem of reconciliation and rejuvenation, Gerz's consultative process aimed to generate forums of public dialogue through two intellectually accessible and highly relevant questions. During the initial stages of the commission Gerz distributed an information leaflet for the people of Coventry asking “*Who are the enemies of the past?*” and “*Who are your modern friends?*” Vickery and Wilson both note that the subject matter was potentially explosive after the fated day of September 11th, as Coventry City Council considered abolishing his project, deeming the former question as dangerous provocation. *(Vickery, 2) (Wilson, 3)* However, Gerz used the latter question as a means to generate dialogue regarding the formation of established and new communities within Coventry based on religion, race, class, inclusion/exclusion, interest and hobby. These two questions served to provide significance and meaning for the *Future Monument*. Gerz's consultative process also aimed to generate forums of intellectually accessible public dialogue predicated on past and present interpersonal reflections to be inculcated in the *Public Bench*. 
Throughout his consultative process he situated another question; “Do you have a friend? Since 1999 the people of Coventry and visitors to the city have commemorated a friendship, a secret relationship or a memorable encounter. The invitation for everyone to contribute to the Public Bench continues until the space is covered with plaques”. (Vickery, 10)

Gerz used these questions to frame his consultative methodology as a negotiated process of social dialogue. This was predicated on active memory construction, with the intent of foregrounding a discursive space encompassing the reactivation and reinterpretation of Coventry's collective history and its broader national identity. His utilization of the obelisk monument and the bench would serve as ciphers to ascertain and transmit this horizon of public discourse. As such Vickery claims that the Future Monument and Public Bench are not objects whose meaning issues from a single “author” speaking in one unified voice. Accordingly, the public takes the role of author and Gerz becomes a transcriber, translator or an orchestrator of a site of meaning. (Vickery, 8) In this sense Gerz readily admits that he does not have control of the meanings that cross and emerge from the art work yet it is his job to secure their emergence and continuity. (Wright, 652)

Fig 10: Jochen Gerz, Future Monument, 2004.
Active Memory Acknowledgement, Reconstruction and Reinterpretation

In an era when traditional monument forms are out of fashion, Gerz's questions thematized aspirations that monuments once so effectively expressed; that of a version of history complementary to the image of a nation state as a moral subject, with a sense of power afforded by a secure and coherent national identity. (Vickery, 4) For Gerz, the Future Monument takes the social compulsion for absolutes that feature in the usual meaning of monuments (a certain version of history and a distinct national identity) as an ever present desire. On a level of social symbolism the Future Monument makes this desire the ground on which the social possibilities of the future have to be negotiated. Although Gerz recognized that our society (or any society) is never free of the desire for absolutes (a desired sense of history and identity), his consultative methodology, which directly informed his co-creative process, served to make this desire reflective. (Vickery, 4). Similarly, Gerz's questions encapsulated in the Public Bench echoes this desire but transmutes it into the realm of the individual. This initiated a “self-presentation of people through acts of memory” while reflecting a broad and diverse relational index of Coventry's population. (Wright, 651)

Future Monument was subsequently manifest as a 4.6 meter high shattered glass compound obelisk which is lit up internally at night. A glass plaque set beside the obelisk proclaims:

The Future Monument is an answer from Coventry's inhabitants to the city's long and often dramatic past. It deals with former enemies becoming friends. Over 5,000 citizens contributed to the artwork. This is a public as well as personal statement and the city council wishes to thank the many Coventrians from other countries who have participated, joining their own memory to the city's history in an endeavour for peace and reconciliation. 40 signatures were needed for a group or minority to be
offered a plaque behind the obelisk to celebrate the diversity of Coventry's present day population.

The obelisk is surrounded by ground level plaques engraved with names of peoples, as proper nouns denoting nationality for the purposes of identifying past enemies who are now contemporary friends which read:

“To our German Friends
To our Japanese Friends
To our Spanish Friends
To our Russian Friends
To our American Friends
To our British Friends
To our French Friends
To our Turkish Friends”

An additional surrounding set of irregularly scattered plaques feature the names of long established and contemporary ethnic communities of Coventry. Wilson notes that the groups represented mark a “coming together of various communities across time and space”. (Wilson, 4) Within this sprawling matrix, plaques representing communities dating from the 1930's such as the Coventry Women's Horticultural society admix with plaques epitomizing “recent inventions of tradition” like the Revivalist Godiva Sisters. Similarly, plaques representing long established Jewish and Barbadian communities admix with plaques representing recent Asian communities such as Mrittika Arts Dance Troupe. (Wilson, 4)

The Public Bench was subsequently manifest as a 45 meter long bench. Citizens and visitors
were invited to commemorate a friendship, a secret relationship or a memorable encounter. Participants thus contributed their name, a second name and a date of their choice. This information was then printed onto a small red metal plaque and mounted on a wall supporting the bench. More than two thousand plaques covered the wall behind the bench when it was inaugurated in January 2004.

Although *Future Monument* and *Public Bench* are categorically distinct in artistic terms, they are both linked by a common characteristic that identifies both of them, namely, plaques. On a level of social symbolism, the plaques signify participatory rather than representative cultural democracy. Contrary to conventional municipal public art consultative practice which it is carried out by a process of representation, Gerz's consultative process sought public participation as a way to inform the meaning and significance of *Future Monument* and *Public Bench*. The plaques also thematize human relationships on both a personal and social level. *Public Bench* defines the personal by identifying names of individual local persons, their friends or family, both living and recently deceased.

![Fig 11: Jochen Gerz, Public Bench, 2004.](image-url)
The *Future Monument* bears plaques of both peoples indicative of international geopolitical narratives and localized community groups resident in Coventry. On a socially symbolic level, it acknowledges the latent internationalism of national identity as the way it is constructed out of an experience of what it is other to, such as other peoples or nations. Vickery notes that one of the most powerful themes that emerged during the *Future Monument* project was that “our historical understanding of other peoples does not have to be structured in terms of past historic conflicts between nation states, or abstract political ideals of national traditions”. *(Vickery, 4)*

On a further socially symbolic level, that of acknowledging Coventry's community groups, *Future Monument* points to another route of trans-social solidarity predicated on exchange and interpretation of memories. *(Vickery, 4)*

This route is articulated through what Vickery calls a “re-encoding” of the traditional monument's visual function. He outlines three ways in which *Future Monument* does this. 1) As war is central to prevailing narratives of Coventry's history and identity, *Future Monument*, by its very title provokes a rethinking of the way understanding of the past determines present thinking, and thus future social possibilities. 2) The plaques surrounding *Future Monument* feature other nations and community groups that do not fit into the traditional civic iconography of a city centre monument thus throwing into relief the heterogeneity of “the past” as opposed to the homogeneity of “official history”. 3) The visual appearance of the *Future Monument* is less a solid aesthetically unified art object than a site or visual fulcrum for words. Vickery identifies this as a linguistic entity, provoking questions, and sharing partial meanings. He notes that it is not a “monument of the future”, but anticipates a future where the very need for, and function of, monuments can be superseded by certain kinds of dialogue. *(Vickery, 6)*
Vickery says that *Future Monument* did not thematize Coventry's role as a site of memory for easy consumption. It was rather manifest through its consultative and co-creative process where collective memory had to be negotiated through a process of dialogue. Certainly for the participants and for the audience this would unfold through connecting the morass of unconnected memories evoked by the names and places written on the plaques. Wilson brings up a particular plaque “To our British friends”, exemplifying, with the most extraordinary discretion, the centuries-long, so often brutal story of Britain’s colonial past and today's multi-cultural society. *(Wilson, 4)* *Future Monument* thus works as part of a socio-cultural project characterized by individualization, as the past is recovered by listening to individual voices. It is also characterized by internationalization, as these voices are located within the context of social groupings with their own distinct story. Yet, Vickery questions the sufficiency of this characterization. He categorizes individualization and internationalism as twinned characteristics of consumerism and the culture of global capitalism. The *Phoenix Initiative* is inevitably part of the Culture Industry, the regeneration of the City in which the interests of entertainment, corporate investment and tourism all merge. Vickery therefore postulates that the values of the nation state and local-regional cultural identities can in fact create philosophical and institutional defences against the erosion of indigenous culture and its values. This is because consumerism re-defines society as a collection of individual consumers desiring a market ever expanding beyond the regulated borders of their nation state. *(Vickery, 6)*

Gerz however situates his process within this contestation of values. More specifically, within *Future Monument's* and *Public Bench's* socially symbolic capacity to signify both national and civic identity formation, participatory rather than representational cultural democracy, and the commodification of national, historical and local identity and cultural expression. *(Wright, 654)*
Vickery suggests that this is a problematic mediated by the mandate that public art must engage with, reflect or emerge from the public interest. (refer to page 12 of my artist statement for the categorical imperative of this mandate) Failing to do so means that the work of art can all too easily function on a level of social symbolism as a source of authority in opposition to the public. For example, the artwork will seem imposed on public space and thus be perceived as a cipher for the decision making power of the state, corporate interests or the artist, or art world institutions. *(Vickery, 6)* Yet, Gerz's consultative and co-creative process took a critical (not an oppositional) stance towards this mandate.

This was articulated in three ways. The first way was in how Gerz's project marked a historic event. In doing so he acknowledged that the *Phoenix Initiative* was a cultural event, rather than situating the *Future Monument* as a self contained work of art (whose source of significance is its visual appearance), it stands as a socially symbolic question mark. Bringing to light past enemies who are now friends, it asks; why did they become enemies? Are they true friends? And, could they become enemies again? Vickery suggests that Gerz's project, rather than marking the culmination of an event, acts as a marker for absent dialogues, repressed or imprisoned by official histories. It's questions are thus quiet but provocative and make potentially difficult references to unresolved historical tensions, or even traumatic memories. *Future Monument* problematizes this memory by admixing names of former colonies, and references to the present ethnic heterogeneity of “the British”. *(Vickery, 8)*

The second way is how Gerz's project involves the public, but not as a general public. According to Vickery, it reveals the general public to be an abstract concept, concealing the broad public who have little or no access to modes of public representation such as public institutions (and their decision making powers), media recognition, or means of public expression. Through his project Gerz ascertained that the social complexity of Coventry was figured in a symbolic form, suggesting
that its abstract yet everyday concept of “the public” was derived from sources categorized as “official” historical narratives, rather than actual knowledge of the present social condition of actual people.

The third way is how the aesthetic sensibility of *Future Monument* harmonizes with its environment yet disrupts the harmony of its appearance. Coinciding with Coventry City Council's conceptual and design thematics Gerz chose to employ the universal sculptural form of the monument and the bench. Yet through his consultative and co-creative process the obelisk was manifest in an un-monumental fashion, refusing to somatically impose on the viewer, thus nullifying its potential as a dominant focal point on *Millennium Place*. Its shattered glass surface disrupts the harmony of its appearance, and as the area is punctuated by specific names, text becomes more significant than imagery. It features names that are inseparable in official historical narratives from specific conflicts and even atrocities. In this sense *Future Monument*, and on a more individualized sense, *Public Bench*, does not stand for and thus socially signify the values of a unified stakeholder horizon. Rather it signifies an anticipated possibility of many conflicting events or stories. (*Vickery, 8*)

Vickery points out that the term “Future Monument” is an obvious paradox of meaning. After all, only the past can be monumentalized. For Gerz, the future, in the form of dialogue, ultimately dissolves the monumentalizing function of the monument. Similarly the *Public Bench* enacts an exemplary public field of inter-personal communication and reflection as a further socially and intellectually relevant means to enter this arena of dialogue. Within the contextual imperatives of *The Phoenix Initiative*, and within broader communicative horizons of municipal and community based public art, it suggests that our potential to critically acknowledge historical and localized narratives has been tempered by the importance communities and municipalities place on the memorializing and socially cohesive function of public art. Gerz's project brings to light that traditional acts of
memorialization actually repress the past, as a past rationalized into “history”, with its many voices lost. Yet Gerz maintains that future memorialization can take the form of a negotiated social dialogue that somehow acknowledges lost voices and can become the dynamic through which a “public” consciousness can emerge. *(Vickery, 8)*

In endeavouring to enable the emergence of this public consciousness, Gerz ultimately based his consultive and co-creative process on a shift of from a concept of art centred on self expression to one based on the ethics of communicative exchange. As Kester points out, the goal of this methodology is to create open ended possibilities of change and transformation within the process of communication that public art can initiate. This, according to Kester encapsulates a more nuanced account of communicative experience which situates the primacy of public art as a process of communication rather than a process of object creation. *(Kester 90)* For Gerz the public emerges through dialogue and the artist creates through dialogue. For his part Vickery maintains that the artistic content of *Future Monument* and *Public Bench* is not their source of significance. But the aesthetics of the work are “affective” because form is integrated with text, and text symbolically inserts itself into a future dialogue. *(Vickery, 8)*

**Conclusion**

In his essay Vickery looks at different ways the consultative processes allows the public (as a range of stakeholders) to utilize public art's capacity for social symbolism. Prevailing mandates in municipal public art policy indicate that it must reflect the public interest. Public commissioning bodies are entrusted to determine the public interest through a formulaic program of consultation based on representation. This is based on general conceptions that are already a part of political discourse of
class, economics, ethnic identity and cultural education. Furthermore, high profile projects such as the Phoenix Initiative often combine public relations and consultation through a public commissioning body such as a city council. As such a city council utilizes public art's capacity of social symbolism to maintain their own corporate profile of presenting themselves in the public interest. Extensive and broad consultation is usually avoided due to high costs and potential forms of public opposition. A highly visible consultation process can situate the art work as a vehicle for a socially symbolic protest against local authorities or the art world. As a result the art work's power of aesthetic signification can be overridden by social signification, producing meanings that have little to with the work in question.

A highly visible and lengthy consultation process is also dissolved by upholding that the unfettered creativity of the artist is in the public interest. On a level of social symbolism, the artist as a member of the general public embodies the freedom of expression afforded to every citizen, thus signifying a socially unrestrained freedom of artistic vision and originality. However, the strategy of upholding the unfettered creativity of the artist can also function on a level of social symbolism as a source of authority in opposition to the public. The artwork will seem imposed on public space and thus be perceived as a cipher for the decision making powers of the state, the local authorities, the artist, or art world institutions. Aiming to invoke acceptance and consensus commissioning bodies often request that artists articulate familiar civic symbols, or established styles that resonate with the works urban or civic context.

Gerz's community based consultative and co-creative process however, was extensive, accessible and personal. It did not appeal to a pre-conception of the public but was revealed through dialogue and conversation over a significant period of time. Vickery says that Gerz's process did not attempt to represent the interest of a coherent or unified stakeholder range of the general public.
However, as research through dialogue, Gerz's process actively searched for micro-communities and their members. According to Vickery, Gerz process consciously re-invested itself in the socially symbolic capacity of public art to include not the representation but the participation of the broad public. Vickery thus categorized this re-investment of public art's capacity for social symbolism as “the realm of public response”. (Vickery, 9)

Within this categorical imperative, “public” is not about art so much as the public capacity for response to art, which for Gerz was recognized through an extensive consultative and co-creative process. It used the response facility art maintains in public spaces in order to register the presence of “the public” in public space. In doing so, Future Monument's and Public Bench's capacity for social symbolism did not represent a unified and coherent public, but symbolically mediated the difference between: a) What the public is, as a socially defined mass, and b) Who the public are, as interrelated individuals each with their own history and identity, yet still as a “mass”, as there are no social-dialogic mechanisms able to articulate this degree of particularity. (Vickery, 9)

Future Monument addressed the social compulsion for absolutes that feature in the meanings of monuments such as a certain version of “official” history and a distinct national identity as an ever present social and personal desire. On a level of social symbolism Future Monument and Public Bench made this desire the ground on which social possibilities of the future have to be negotiated between international and individual identity formation. It thus pointed to another route of trans-social solidarity predicated on exchange and the re-interpretation of memories. Gerz's project took a critical stance in making reference to unresolved historical tensions and memories as a component of British national identity by admixing names of former colonies and references to the present ethnic heterogeneity of the British “Public”. In doing so, his process involved the public, but not as a general public. It revealed
that conceptions of the broad public to be an abstract concept, concealing all kinds of people and
groups who have little or no access to modes of social life though which they become “public”. This is
ultimately how Gerz's consultative and co-creative process expanded public art's capacity for social
symbolism to signify the social complexity of Coventry as a site of memory and as a site of emerging
public consciousness. By making art the site of social dialogue, Gerz redefined art as development and
process rather than the production of super-valuable objects. While communicating the meaning and
significance of the creative process of dialogue, his consultative process may last for years and may not
even produce an actual art work. Gerz says that “Art is not the most difficult thing one can do or put up
with today. More difficult, however is to 'divert' art (as the Situationists put it), using its aura in order to
make something more surprising happen: public meaning. In this way, art becomes an art of dialogue
as form; a form that takes on a life of its own. And this I would call 'poetry' today”. (Wright, 652)
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Chapter 3

Documentation of Practice

Section One: The New School of Colour (2010-present) - Using the methodological tactic of D'erive to Derive a Community Based Practice

In 2008, artist and educator Tim Rollins delivered the keynote address at my convocation ceremony in Calgary Alberta. Although I had no idea who he was or what his practice entailed, his impassioned delivery, denoting the value and responsibility of the artist within our communities made an indelible impression on me. Although I did not realize it at that time, his words would set a philosophical and political trajectory for my practice. However, another highly significant factor would influence the personal direction of my practice. This was the move that I made from Calgary, Alberta to London Ontario. For the first time in my life I had psychologically, socially and physically displaced myself on a voluntary level. I therefore instinctively utilized an artistic tactic of mapping to orientate myself. This entailed my own consideration and interpretation of Guy Debord's theory of the d'erive.

As I was developing an interest in the possible forms and iterations of community I embarked on a process of social mapping. The initial stage of this process keyed into Debord's concept of drifting. As such I embarked on walks around downtown and beyond in no particular pattern because I had very little knowledge of London's psycho-geography. Using a camera I sought to ascertain information about London and engage people through a photo-documentary and artistic story telling invitation. I then embarked on a detailed implementation of social mapping which included a series of personal interviews with activist, business, religious and cultural leaders in London. The content of the
interviews revolved around community from a leadership point of view. These perspectives as seen from sources of authority and influence inevitably lead me to interview leaders within the social service sector. These were perspectives as seen from sources of vulnerability and inability. This process played out as an investigation where interviews and information seemed to derive from a common discourse.

This common discourse was derived from the economic and social dynamic of the Old East Village Community. This dynamic entailed a dichotomy between commercial and residential economic/cultural development and the permutation of social services/low income housing. More specifically, local businesses claim that this conglomeration of social services and their highly visible constituency detracts potential customers from coming into the community. The Old East Village Business Improvement Area also claims that this conglomeration complicates their imperative of developing and marketing the community as an arts district which ultimately affects property values of both local business owners and home owners. A further complication within this dynamic is that the social service mechanism within the Old East Village cannot simply dissolve or transplant to new communities throughout London. Thus a dialogue and discursive space entailing this dynamic has permeated the community for well over a decade.

Within this discourse, it seemed to me that the voices of business owners and residents were represented by commercial and residential institutions. Similarly, it seemed to me that the voices of constituents of social services were represented by social service institutions. This arrangement is by no means unusual but I became interested in investigating how the voices of every day community members could be publicly articulated through participation as opposed to representation within this discourse. This is because I was researching two key sources which would essentially guide my
practice as they best fit the social and artistic context that I had arrived at.

The first source was Grant Kester's book *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art*. From his book I derived that public art can indeed fulfill different functions in varying degrees. The artists whom Kester writes about are primarily focused on public art's function and capacity to build or develop community. In some cases the artists endeavour to create consensual solutions to inter-communal social problems. Moreover, these artists aim to decrease limitations and expand possibilities within boundaries of difference through a consensual recognition of diverse interests and forms of representation. A commonality of the community based practices Kester writes about rely on collaborative participation of the artist and community members. A prevailing concept is the artist’s strategic implementation and use of dialogue as a consultative and process based ingredient to provide meaning and significance to the public art project. These projects typically take place in the community of their stakeholder range. According to Kester these factors enable the process to be validated as art in a performative sense in that (in addition to the produced object/image) conventional knowledge is challenged by the creation of new discursive spaces and communities through the dialogical process of the project.

The second source was Tim Rollins and his *Art and Knowledge Workshop*. This was a community based and collaborative art studio created by Rollins in 1981 when he was recruited by the principal of Intermediate School 52 in the South Bronx to develop a curriculum that incorporated art-making with reading and writing lessons for academically or emotionally at risk students. Rollins and his students, known as K.O.S. (Kids of Survival), collaboratively developed a strategy of art-making that combined literacy and creative expression. This studio subsequently grew both within its
programming imperative and capacity of outreach establishing workshops, and with that leadership and participant opportunities for youths in schools and institutions throughout the United States. Rollins and K.O.S. subsequently achieved critical and art institutional notoriety on several occasions as their work was exhibited and purchased in within this arena.

From both of these sources I derived that a method of dialogical engagement, predicated on active and responsive collaboration between myself and members of the community of the Old East Village could indeed constitute a substantive community based public art platform. As such I sought out a space or place where this could happen as a communal centre or base of engagement. However, I discovered this place from Debord's theory of d'erive because I was still quite unfamiliar with the psycho-geography of the Old East Village. Although I had researched commercial, residential and social service institutional perspectives in the community my social mapping unexpectedly lead me to the Ark Aid street mission. After having a conversation with the executive director we decided that a public art program may help to bring new individual creative voices to the community of the East Village. As a stakeholder the Ark Aid was interested in challenging prevailing conceptions about its constituency and itself as an institution. As a stakeholder I was interested in developing a creative space of sociability which could enable me to clearly understand and engage with the discourse of the East Village.

Fig 12: The New School of Colour started out as a makeshift studio in a room in the Ark Aid street mission. Every week participants worked closely together on a tarp covered pool table. Jan, 2010.
It was my hope that participants as stakeholders, whether they be constituents or non-constituents of the Ark Aid would be able to explore their own sense of creativity and potentially display their artwork to the broader community, thus adding their individual voice to the discourse prevalent in the East Village. As such several NSOC public exhibitions have been held in studios, coffee shops and libraries within the East Village and beyond to the greater community of London.

Fig 13: By June 2010 I was able to ascertain funding from the Agape foundation in order to build a functioning studio in the basement of the Ark Aid.

Fig 14: The new studio provided much needed space for an ever expanding group of artists. Some took their development very seriously while others simply enjoyed the sociability of the space. Aug 2010.
Fig 15: One of several New School of Colour public art exhibitions. These were organized and installed collaboratively by myself and artists of the NSOC. These art exhibitions played an important role in bringing together NSOC artists with the broader community of the East Village. Feb 2011 at the East Village Arts Co-op.

Like most local business improvement institutions, the Old East Village Business Improvement Area (OEVBIA) is utilizing the Creative City strategy to shape their revitalization and economic development imperative. As such the community has been and continues to be developed and marketed by the OEVBIA as an arts and culture district. As the director of the New School of Colour it was and continues to be my endeavour to encourage NSOC artists to be included within this development strategy. I feel that this inclusion can publicly demonstrate that community members who are facing social barriers can in fact add diversity and value to the local visual culture of the Old East Village. In this way NSOC artists are able to actively participate in the discourse of the Old East Village by representing themselves through their own sense of creativity.
In addition to being a community based public art project, the New School of Colour has allowed me to connect and build many relationships. Certainly, building trusting relationships with participants has aided their development and confidence in exhibiting their work. Yet, the New School of Colour has in many ways situated a unique consultative role for my practice. This is because through the development, public communications and marketing of the NSOC (this program is funded through grants and donations and thus must maintain a clear and concise communications/marketing strategy) I have been able to establish relationships with the residential, business and social service communities of the Old East Village. This relationship building has gone far beyond institutional frameworks to the interpersonal level of everyday community members in their house, on the street or in the shop. This has allowed me to gain an understanding of the discourse of the East Village in such a way where I could facilitate community based public art from a well informed perspective.

For current information about the New School of Colour refer to  www.newschoolofcolour.com
Section Two: The Community Monument (August - September 2010)

Fig 17: Jeremy Jeresky and community members within and beyond the Old East Village, *The Community Monument*. 60in x 36in x 5in. Installed on the West exterior of the Ark Aid mission, 2010.

A highly significant influence on the function and concept of *The Community Monument* was an essay written by Dr. Jonathan Vickery titled, *Public Art as Public Authorship: Jochen Gerz's Future Monument and The Public Bench in Coventry City Centre*. Vickery's essay essentially laid out and described terms applicable to public art such as public art's cultural, aesthetic, and socially symbolic
function. His essay also described a particular approach in the consultation and creation of public art through an examination of Jochen Gerz's twinned projects *Future Monument* and *Public Bench*.

Although it took me a while to fully synthesize the ideas and concepts that Vickery was writing about, his essay inspired me to facilitate a community based public artwork which would utilize public participation as a means to develop its meaning, significance and aesthetic. This thinking was in line with how Gerz articulated his view on the cultural function of public art as an active relation within the discourse of the public. (*Vickery, 2*) Moreover, much like Gerz's project I conceived the function of *The Community Monument* to make art the site of social dialogue, and not politics or social issues.

Fig 18 & Fig 19: Situated as a community based public art event, participants were invited to have a photo taken of them and their object of choice that they would contribute to the monument. Participants were also invited to write about their object. This was subsequently displayed on a blog site.
Do you have an object that says something about you?
The Community Monument is a new public art event commemorating community growth, diversity and creativity. You are invited to bring an object that has personal meaning to you and add it to the Community Monument.

What kind of objects can you bring?
The objects will be attached to a wall. Therefore, the maximum weight of the object cannot exceed 5 pounds. Objects can be up to 4 feet in height. The maximum thickness cannot exceed 3 inches.

Some examples are:
a watch, a paintbrush, a hammer, a toy, eye glasses, marbles, a mug, a cell phone, a book, a badminton racquet, a key, a shoe, a necklace, a bracelet, a Christmas ornament, a golf ball, a hockey puck, a plate, a picture frame, a bottle cap, a CD or cassette, a dog or cat collar, a mouse or mouse pad, a keyboard, a mirror, a comb or brush, buttons, a zippo lighter, a flute, a candle...

FREE BBQ
12 pm - 2 pm

FREE Concert
12 pm - 4 pm

FEATURING
Cordcycling,
Pilots of Dawn
The Half Timers
Kyle Peterkin

WHERE: The ARK AID Mission 696 Dundas st.
WHEN: Saturday August 28 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Fig 20: Flyers and posters for this community based public art event were circulated widely throughout the East Village. Although the population of the community was highly diverse in terms of socio-economic orientation I endeavoured to facilitate a concept which held a commonality and sense of accessibility to people of all ages, that of connection and narrative to objects of meaning.
Fig 21 & Fig 22: Situated as a community based public art event *The Community Monument* endeavoured to be accessible to people of all ages. Furthermore media outlets were invited to participate so as to broadcast the meaning and significance of the project to a broader audience.

Fig 23 & Fig 24: Within the duration of *The Community Monument's* existence I looked to Vickery's assertion that public art objects can embody the current complex of public experience. I thus maintained a personal presence in the public sphere by engaging passers by in conversation regarding their feelings and questions about the images or objects within *The Community Monument*. 
One evening in late September *The Community Monument* was de-installed through what could be at first considered an act of vandalism. Ark Aid staff arrived in the morning to discover that the monument had been ripped out from the wall and splayed across the entire West perimeter of the building to the back parking lot and beyond. To classify this an act of vandalism is far too reductive considering its street level placement and its capacity for social symbolism as a public art object. Again I look to Gerz's approach to public art which pretends no power of control over the social dialogue emerging around the work, where even acts of vandalism can be but one aspect of a larger process of social dialogue. Of course I felt terrible that participant objects were destroyed, and I contacted most of them to explain what had happened. (This was made possible by a participation document including contact information which participants filled out) However, this larger process of social dialogue which entailed *The Community Monument's* de-installation illustrated the social symbolic capacity of public art in terms of what it can potentially signify and in terms of its potential public response.

For example, on a socially symbolic level *The Community Monument* signified cultural democracy in terms of the collaborative meaning and significance embedded within the art object. I as the artist essentially created a framework wherein participants contributed the content. However, this modality, coupled with its placement on the Ark Aid exterior could be seen as a concept imposed on public space and thus viewed as a cipher for decision making powers (in this case aesthetic and cultural) of the artist and the social service/faith based institution. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to consider the possibility that the de-installation of the art object could have fulfilled a different means of communication within a larger process of social dialogue for some members of the community. As such this project evolved in a way which considered these social variables.
Section Three: The New Community Museum (2010-2011)

Fig 25: One of fourteen New Community Museum photo-text panels (17in x 23in) installed on store front windows of local businesses along Dundas Street in the East Village community. In this panel Dan Lenart talks about his connection to the building he is photographed in front of and how it relates to issues of affordable housing and poverty, two issues prevalent in the community.

Studying Jochen Gerz's working methodology and the artistic working methodologies indexed in Kester's Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art lead me to study the working methodologies inculcated by Group Material. This trajectory of research was of course
delineated by the context of my newly formulating community based practice which would inform how I could approach The New School of Colour and *The Community Monument*. Moreover, this trajectory of research would also influence *The New Community Museum*. In her article titled *Citizen Artist: Group Material* published in *Afterall A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* (Spring 2011) Alison Green describes Group Material's interests as a focus on “the politics of representation”. *(Green, 17)* She notes that Group Material employed a range of curatorial strategies which involved working collectively and in relation to specific cultural situations. *(Green, 18)* This included a community curatorial approach wherein they rented a store front as a gallery space and utilized contributions from people within the community to provide content and meaning to the space.

Green notes that the significance of Group Material's “democratic” attitude was not based on the rejection of the programme of the white cube, but in how their method of display supported the set of meanings already granted by owners of the objects. For group Material, the value of the objects rested in their sentimentality, a quality they felt was absent from most artwork that strives to mean something to a general audience. *(Green, 19)* Although Group Material was not attempting to reject the programme of the white cube Green makes it clear that the group's main point of resistance was the commercial art world and its reliance on named artists and discrete, saleable objects. Group Materials community curatorial approach thus attempted to open this closed circle of aesthetic value.

The main aesthetic and cultural function of *The New Community Museum* was (as with *The Community Monument* and my future community based art projects) to actively engage with the discourse of the East Village. Keying in on Group Material's community curatorial approach, I conceived *The New Community Museum* as a succession of store fronts along several blocks of Dundas Street. The museum pieces on display were 17 inch by 23 inch photo-text panels. Community members
were invited to talk about a space or place that was important or meaningful to them. These spaces and/or places did not have to necessarily be in the community but relate to the community in some way. As I had been active in the community for about a year I had subsequently developed relationships with artists, business owners, constituents of social service services, home owners, activists and every day people whom I would talk to on the street. This allowed me to invite a broad and diverse mix of community members to participate. Local business owners were fairly receptive to participating in the project as vehicles of public display. I viewed the placement of these panels along the storefronts of Dundas Street as strategic because of its high flow of pedestrian traffic.

Fig 26: Local business owners were receptive to having the photo-text panels placed in their front windows as long as the panels were not too big. Local business owners also had varied political and social views. As such, panels that articulated serious social issues were matched with business owners who supported or were engaged with such issues.
Fig 27: A map installed on the West exterior wall of the Ark Aid mission indicated where New Community Museum panels could be found.
Dave Lewis  
Engine 86

the mogul 260 on display at Queens Park  
makes me think and stop and connect to the spot  
a symbol of heritage and hope for all man  
helping people to take dreams where they can

Chorus: engine 86 one of the last of its kind  
broke new ground to the end of the rail line  
six generations have lived laughed and cried  
one’s journey is complete if one really has tried

people are traveler’s in body and in spirit  
to places defined by events and those in it  
we want prosperity with wellness teeming  
we are entitled to joy that love is achieving

Chorus

a train brought me to London and I didn’t know  
how mixed blessings can teach us as they unfold  
Old East Village has a revival now in heart  
revising a past and building new starts

Chorus

Fig 28: A remake of Dave Lewis's NCM panel.
Fig 29: The photo portion of Meagen Pyper’s NCM panel.
**Meagen Pyper in Conversation with Jeremy Jeresky**

**Old East Commons Community Garden**

**JJ:** Tell me about the consultation process that Life Spin endeavoured upon in order to create a useful space that the community could create together.

**MP:** Life Spin owns a lot where a once derelict house stood. The house was beyond repair and had to be torn down. This was back in 2006. So we took it upon ourselves at Life Spin to find out what the community would like to see,...... how this new empty lot, this potential space could be best utilized. We went door to door, in an effort to ascertain what community members in the immediate vicinity would like to see and use in this space. Finally, we held a forum at Aeolian Hall, where the community was invited to bring their ideas and voices together in order to: 1) realize how this space could best be utilized and: 2) understand how diverse community members could most benefit by sharing a communal space. It was decided that a community green space, which was very lacking in the local landscape, would be the most beneficial project that could fulfill the community’s needs.

**JJ:** I find it very interesting that the consultation process that Life Spin went through took a pretty long time, 5 years in fact. Can you comment on this extended duration, as it most likely created the Commons.

**MP:** It took 5 years to create this space, and in doing so it allowed many different organizations, community members and businesses to come together in order to be a part of its creative process. In this sense we were not only able to secure appropriate funding for this garden, but we were able to design a space that could meet the needs and interests of local children, teenagers, young families and seniors.

**JJ:** Could you elaborate on how Old East Commons addresses these particular needs and interests?

**MP:** Well for instance Home Depot provided funding and support for the fence and gate of The Commons. And Reforest London also supported the planting of 20 trees within this space. A Local artist designed and constructed the sign and plaque of this garden. Local residents have contributed to the landscape of The Commons by donating bulbs for perennial flowers. The space is also wheel chair accessible, and several programs have been established to cater to the needs of seniors in the community. There is also an adjoining basket ball court and net available for the local youth to use and enjoy. The most exciting program this summer will invite children from the neighbourhood to participate in day camp activities. This camp will feature ‘Pocket Sized Farms’, which will give children gardening space to plant and grow their own vegetables. Of course, anybody is welcome, and we encourage everybody to come, relax and enjoy this new communal green space.

Fig 30: The text based portion of Meagen Pyper's NCM panel.
Fig 31: The photo portion of Holly Weaver and Julia Batmann's NCM panel.
A Safe Space

Safe space is a number of different things – we've really come a long way with regards to what our initial start was. We started originally as a welcoming and social space, where women working in the sex trade could come to, and not necessarily feel like they were accessing a social service...it was more of a get together kind of space, a space to feel secure, empowered and not judged...but many donations and supplies for women in crisis eventually came into the domain of Safe Space – and because of the heightened aggression that many sex workers in the neighbourhood have come to experience,... we wanted to have a stronger focus on sex work to counter act this aggression.

This kind of aggression has come from the general public...from those in cars who drive along Dundas and shout derogative comments to forms of local media representation, who project them as a kind of transient problem...as criminals on par with drug dealers, as a group of people that don't belong in the community....A lot of people think that they are the scum of the street and need to be removed from the area because they bring down consumer traffic and decrease property values. People do not seem to understand that many sex workers who operate in the neighbourhood are very interconnected to the community because they live here, and many were raised here,...so there is this idea that sex workers are often seen as vagrants,...moving from area to area,...because of this stigma, it's easy not to identify with them and that becomes a way for people to forcibly exclude them from the community.

Safe Space offers a networking apparatus as well as information and collective tip sharing for sex workers so they can operate safely and within legal structures that are available to them. We bring in different groups to conduct workshops and offer basic necessities like toiletries, makeup and condoms. We really want to create an environment where people can feel safe – that is off the street – where women know they can feel secure, interact and not feel ashamed to be a sex worker.

At Safe Space, we realize that sex work is legitimate work – and we feel it should be decriminalized. Of course, if women are interested in getting out of sex work, we also offer support for that – However, we do completely support a women's right to choose or refuse sex work. The crux of the issue is choice, it is not someone outside of their lives telling them what their proper choice should be. We are open to all women, and have programs catered to those in crisis and to those who see it as legitimate work and advocate its decriminalization.

Fig 32: A portion of Holly Weaver and Julia Batmann's NCM text panel.

The New Community Museum functioned to actively engage in the discourse of the East Village in several ways. It engaged local businesses to display the photo-text panels. It engaged a broad and diverse range of participants who, through communicating their ideas of place and space, could
represent themselves within this discourse. As the curator of the NCM I had to spend a considerable amount of time in the consultation phase of the project. This involved several sets of interviews and conversations to determine how participants felt most comfortable in communicating their ideas. This brings to mind Gemma Corradi Fumara's empathetic ethic of active listening as part of this consultative methodology. Because the NCM participants came from diverse backgrounds they had different ways of comfortably articulating their idea of space or place. Thus some participants wrote songs, others preferred to be interviewed, others preferred a conversational mode of communication and others preferred to write something out themselves. In terms of the socially symbolic function of the NCM, it signified a horizon of cultural democracy in terms of the diversity and potential for localized artistic and cultural production. This coincides with the imperative of the OEVBIA to create and market the East Village as an arts and cultural district.

Section Four: The Wishing Wall (2011, 2012)

Fig 33 & Fig 34: During the summer of 2011 and 2012 community members attending the Old East Village Block Party and the East Village Street Sale were invited to add their voice to The Wishing Wall mural.
Gerz's idea about public art's cultural function entailing an active relation within the discourse of the public got me thinking about different ways in which this could happen. In terms of a public consultative methodology I looked to Gerz's use of questions as a means to frame the content, meaning and significance of the public art object. I thus conceived The Wishing Wall through a series of conversations with people in the community about ways in which accessible yet critical questions could be used to create collaborative public art.

Fig 35: Posters and information leaflets were disseminated throughout the community in order to explain the purpose of The Wishing Wall as a collaborative public artwork.
In the summer of 2011 and 2012 *The Wishing Wall* project situated itself as a public art event in conjunction with the annual East Village Street Sale and the Old East Village Block Party. With the help of New School of Colour Artists I set up and facilitated booths at both of these events. Community members were invited to respond to two questions. First, *What do you like best about your community?* I viewed this question and its potential for response as a positive way for participants to acknowledge the hard work, progress and generally good things that community members were bringing to their local environment. The second question, *What can we do to make our community a better place to live?*, served to open up and articulate spaces of criticality. Participants were invited to write or draw their responses on colourfully painted pieces of wood which represented bricks. These bricks would subsequently be installed in a brick wall like pattern on the West Exterior wall of the Ark Aid mission.

Fig 36: *The Wishing Wall* detail. Installed on the West exterior of the Ark Aid mission, 2011.
Fig 37: Through conversations with community members *The Wishing Wall* endeavoured to be accessible through the questions that framed its meaning and significance thus allowing children and adults to participate in its actualization. It also invited participants to contribute positive and critical thoughts.

Fig 38: At the Old East Village Block Party participants who wrote their thoughts on colourful wood bricks took an unexpected performative approach to the installation by arranging their bricks within a brick wall like grid. Attendees of the Block Party were thus able to view the artwork as it was being created.
Section Five: Les Jardins de Carton (2011)

Fig 39: Les Jardins de Carton was a community based collaborative performative installation in conjunction with World Homeless Action Day. It took place on October 2011 in the parking lot of Museum London. As a public art event the public was invited to participate in the performance.

Les Jardins de Carton was a public art project that represented a significant shift in my practice in that I moved beyond working within the community of the East Village to the broader community of London. As a member of the London Homeless Coalition I worked with some of its members to create a performative public collaborative art installation in conjunction with World Homeless Action Day. The socially symbolic function of this project signified a discursive entry into the broader discourse of affordable housing within London. As a publicly collaborative and performative installation Les Jardins de Carton was predicated on an absurd fictitious event complete with predetermined actor roles and real media coverage. This event entailed the ground breaking and construction of a cardboard condominium financed by the fictitious entity Facade Property Development. This development was
thematized as a pragmatic solution to the affordable housing problem afflicting London Ontario and other Canadian Municipalities. Within this performative installation Abe Oudshoorn, a professor at the University of Western Ontario's faculty of Nursing took on the role of the CEO of Facade Property Development. I took on the role of the Construction foreman of Facade Property Development. Before the event a construction workshop was established at the East Village Arts Collective wherein the public was invited to gain knowledge about this project and create accouterments to the cardboard condominium, such as curtains, couches, tables, chairs and even a toilet. Corporate funding was ascertained by myself and Oudshoorn through 3M Canada and Hudson Boat Works.

Fig 40: Promotional material for Les Jardins de Carton. This was disseminated throughout London as poster and PDF and targeted local media enclaves such as the CBC and CTV.
Fig 41: The ground breaking ceremony in which Facade Property Development CEO Abe Oudshoorn and construction foreman Jeremy Jeresky addressed construction participants and the local media.
Fig 42: Participants and passersby engage with the construction of *Les Jardins de Carton*.

Fig 43: Participants and passersby were given cardboard safety helmets (safety first) and written fact sheets about statistics regarding affordable housing in London Ontario.
Fig 44: As construction foreman it was my responsibility to make sure that participants wore cardboard safety helmets and completely understood how to safely utilize duct tape and Exacto knives.

Fig 45: As an inclusive art event families were encouraged to take part as an endeavour to engage people of all ages with the discourse of affordable housing in London, Ontario.
Fig 46: Interior design provided by artists from the New School of Colour.

Fig 47: Interior design provided by artists from the New School of Colour.
Fig 48 & Fig 49: Participants help out with the construction of *Les Jardins de Carton*.
Fig 50 & Fig 51: Interviews to local media about Facade Property Development's highly innovative affordable housing solution.
Fig 52 & Fig 53: Protesters voicing against Facade Property Development's innovative solution to end affordable housing deficiencies.
Fig 54: The official Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.

Fig 55 and Fig 56: Official tours of *Les Jardins de Carton*. The Museum London parking lot was chosen for its central location and availability of space.

Refer to You Tube video  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq2VhmDNAFY
Works Cited


http://www.gerz.fr/deb/put_file.html?ident=1c8acc3e03ba49c1e31e5bf6adc63fa5
Jeremy Jeresky

Education

2013 Master of Fine Arts The University of Western Ontario
2008 Bachelor of Fine Art (painting) Alberta College of Art & Design
2000-02 Foundation and second year studies Alberta College of Art & Design

Community Art Projects

2012-13 *The New School of Colour*  
Artistic Director & Program Coordinator for Trillium funded Glen Cairn initiative  
London, Ontario

2012-13 *Youth Economic Development Initiative*  
Artistic Director for Boys & Girls Club and the City of London  
London, Ontario

2013 *Nuit Blanche London Space and Place*  
Artistic Director for Museum London  
London, Ontario

2013 *Westmount Community Mural*  
Artistic Director for Boys and Girls Club, The Westmount Family Centre and the City of London  
London, Ontario

2010-12 *The New School of Colour*  
Artistic Director & Program Coordinator in partnership with the Ark Aid Mission  
London, Ontario

2012 *Atlohsa Community Mural*  
Artistic Director in partnership with Atlohsa Native Family Healing Services and The New School of Colour  
London, Ontario

2012 *Cross Cultural Learner Centre Mural*  
Artistic Director for the Cross Cultural Learner Centre  
London, Ontario

2011/12 *The Wishing Wall*  
Artistic Director in partnership with the Ark Aid Mission & the Old East Village Block Party  
London, Ontario
2012 *PostCards in Action*
Artistic Director
for the Cross Cultural Learner Centre London, Ontario

2011 *Les Jardines de Carton*
Artistic Director
in partnership with the London Homeless Coalition and Museum London London, Ontario

2011 *Westmount Community Public Art Project*
Artistic Director
in partnership with the Cross Cultural Learner Centre London, Ontario

2010 *The Community Monument*
Artistic Director
in partnership with the Ark Aid Mission London, Ontario

2010 *The Department of Gossip and Complaints*
Artistic Director & Head of Complaints London, Ontario

2010 *The New Community Museum*
Artistic Director
in partnership with local retail business in the Old East Village London, Ontario

**Exhibitions**

**Solo Shows**

2008 *Flight of Fancy series two*, Axis Gallery Calgary, Alberta
*Flight of Fancy series two*, Ideal Gallery Calgary, Alberta
*Flight of Fancy series two*, Alberta College of Art & Design Calgary, Alberta

2007 *Flight of Fancy series one*, Marion Nicoll Gallery Calgary, Alberta
*Flight of Fancy series one*, Café Koi Calgary, Alberta
*Flight of Fancy series one*, Rasoi Calgary, Alberta

2006 *History Revisited*, Club Soda Calgary, Alberta

**Group Shows**

2010 *Ampersand*, The Art Lab Gallery London, Ontario
2008  BMO 1st Art Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art  
      Toronto, Ontario
2006/07  Thought Express, Arts and Culture Calgary, Victoria’s  
      Calgary, Alberta

Grants and Awards

2013  CAIP grant for materials and supplies for The New School of Colour
2012  Trillium Community Operating Grant for The New School of Colour
2010  Pillar Non Profit Network Community Innovation Award
2010  Agape Foundation Community Special Projects Grant for The New School of Colour
2010  McIntosh Gallery’s First Artist in the Community, London, Ontario
2008  Alberta Foundation For the Arts Visual Arts Grant - Project No. AFA09/2135
2008  BMO 1st Art Invitational Student Art Competition National Winner
2008  Barbara and John Poole Family Scholarship
2007  Jason Lang Scholarship
2001  Jason Lang Scholarship

Collections

BMO Financial Group Corporate Art Collection, Toronto, Ontario
Torode Group of Companies Corporate Art Collection, Calgary, Alberta

Published Material

2009  “How to Read A Painting?” Shotgun Review.ca
2008  “Park Your Art in a no Gallery Zone”, Current Projects, edition eight  
      Published by the Alberta College of Art & Design
      Published by the Alberta College of Art & Design