Transformative Community Art: Re-visioning the Field of Practice

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Community art is a multidisciplinary practice that was engendered by two main perspectives on art; a functionalist approach and an ‘art as essential to humanity’ approach. These differing ideological positions led to the construction of polarizing dichotomies that divided the field of practice and stagnated the community art discourse. This thesis re-visions community art as transformative community art (T.C.A.) to integrate a diverse range of practice into a distinct, recognizable field, transcend the binaries inherited from its founding fields, and identify the field as an innovative artistic movement and radical practice for social change. In this thesis T.C.A. is employed as a framework for theorizing practice. Threats to T.C.A. from funding structures, cooptation, and institutionalisation are explored and strategies of resistance identified. The concept of T.C.A. is mobilized to identify areas for future work; raising questions and ideas that can contribute to advancing a more complex, nuanced, and productive discourse.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many people.

Foremost I would like to thank all of my colleagues in community art. For introducing me to this work I would like to thank INPHRU and Art Jam. For shaping my views and inspiring my thinking, I thank everyone involved with the Culture - Locality and Creativity project: La Casa de los Tres Mundos, El Proyecto Cultural El Sitio, La Comisión Ciudadana en Santa Rosa de Copán, and especially Tiempos Nuevos Teatro and Vecinos for actively engaging with me in my thesis work. I am especially grateful to my colleagues in the culture project team, with whom I was also fortunate to collaborate with in the collective expresarte: Natalie Ramos, Marielena Villalta Pucci, Sophía Herra Castro, Marco Chía, Fernando Franco, and Ricardo González. Your passion and commitment is a true source of inspiration.

For introducing me to the community art community in Toronto, being a co-conspirator in community art and academics, and supporting my academic, professional, and personal journeys, I am deeply grateful to Leah Houston.

My deepest gratitude goes to David Anderson and my colleagues at Clay & Paper Theatre. David, your vision of theatre as ‘thinking in public’, as an integral part of the community and our human experience, and as a defender of public space have greatly shaped my views. I am thankful for all of the talks we have shared over the years and for your unwavering support and belief in me. To my colleagues at Clay & Paper Theatre, I thank you for being overly generous with your time and for taking on additional work so that I could take some dedicated time to work on this project. I could not have completed this thesis if I had not known that Clay & Paper was in good hands with Bernadette Wycks, Larissa Koniuk, Leanne Eisen, and Amira Routledge.

At OISE I will be eternally grateful to my supervisor Roger Simon who was my first contact at OISE when I was considering pursuing graduate studies and who supported me throughout this journey. Roger, your clear insight and thoughtful questions clarified my thinking and brought me to new understandings of the work I want to undertake. Thank you for your understanding, availability, and continued support. I am also grateful to Angela Miles, who received my first academic paper on community art in her Community Education and Organizing course and kindly agreed to become my second reader. Angela, your suggestions and questions have made this a stronger thesis and I am extremely grateful for your time and input. I would also like to thank Kristine Pearson, Graduate Student Liaison Officer extraordinaire, for making everything on the administrative side always work out right. I always left your office feeling positive; your encouragement made me feel that this project was possible.

I also could not have completed this work without the unwavering support of my friends whom I consider to be my family. For supports too numerous to mention I want to thank Marcia Barry and Nancy Slamet. For encouragement, coaching, and cheerleading I am grateful to Pam Van Nest. For proofreading above and beyond the call of duty, I am indebted to the talented and generous Jody Smith. And for opening their home to me and
providing an ideal location in which to write, I am grateful to Ivano Stocco and Aitana Guia.

Jill Goodreau was my constant companion throughout this masters’ journey. Jill and I made the decision to go to graduate school, completed our applications, course work, and thesis together despite being in different departments and sometimes in different countries. Jill, I could not have finished this thesis without you. I can never thank you enough for everything you have done for me throughout this process. Your generosity, time, insight, and friendship are invaluable to me.

Finally, I want to thank my community at 57 Spencer Ave. who supplied me with companionship, food and drink, a quiet work environment, support with the daily tasks of life, and access to a massage chair and the solace of communal cats. Vince, Jeanette, Henry, John, and Dalal I am thankful that you are all a part of my community.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the remarkable women of Vecinos, Ana, Milagro, Xiomara, and Alice and my inspirational colleagues in the culture project team, Natalie, Marielena, Sophía, Fernando, Chía, and Ricardo.

Sagrada Familia lost a valuable resource on December 19, 2008.

Also to my Clay & Paper family.
Chapter 1: Introduction

“The goal of Clay & Paper Theatre is to change the world. Completely. Irrevocably.”
David Anderson, Clay & Paper Theatre

“We have two types of puppet shows: good ones and bad ones, but all of them are for good and against evil.” Peter Schumann, Bread and Puppet Theater

What does it mean when a theatre company’s primary goal is not to create theatre, but to change the world? How can a theatre company change the world? How does it work to achieve its goal? With whom? What impact does its socially and politically defined objective have on its art? What makes a good puppet show good or a bad puppet show bad? If a bad puppet show is against evil, does that make it good? What is bad art? Does an admirable social goal make bad art good? How can we tell if the world has been changed through the actions of a puppet theatre company? Do we need to know if it has? Does it matter if we aren’t sure?

Reflection on these two brief and seemingly simple statements of purpose from the founders of two community-focused puppet theatre companies opens up a rich area of inquiry about the nature of art and its role in society. And nowhere is this conversation taken up more fiercely than in the contested and contentious field of community art; a field whose existence, whose purpose, whose history, and whose very name poses and wrestles with these questions. What issues are raised by placing the qualifier ‘community’ next to ‘art’? (Barndt, 2004). What is the relationship between the ‘art’ and the ‘community’; is the community an interactive audience? A participant in art-making? Does the community supply the information, inspiration and/or the materials for the art?

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1 www.clayandpapertheatre.org
2 Schumann, 2002/2007
Does the context of the community inform the theme explored, the forms employed, or the aesthetic intentions of the work? Are the relationships formed, the very development of ‘community’, the art? (Lacy, 1995; Marché 1998; Resonance Creative Consulting Partners, 2008). What responsibility do the art and the artist have toward the community? ‘Community’ and ‘art’ are powerful and contested concepts that hold large bodies of meaning, assumptions, and ethical implications, yet in the developing community art discourse they are rarely examined and the ways in which these terms are used are not often enough made explicit. Indeed ‘community art’, a concept originally constructed as an exciting possibility for new and novel ideas of collaborative art making and social change; new forms, challenging aesthetics, and a re-engagement of art with the social sphere is becoming an empty portmanteau word carrying everything and therefore nothing (Pacific, 1999b).

The field of practice that we currently refer to as community art has become widespread in the last 30 years. Developing out of multidisciplinary roots and a hailstorm of controversy, community art is a diverse field that incorporates a wide range of practice and theoretical constructs; a field that continues to grow, to develop, to adapt, and to change as it is taken up and explored by diverse political, social, economic, and artistic interests. How then can we identify the current field of practice of community art? Essentially, community art is the practice of artists working in non-traditional art settings and creating art with or for the benefit of communities or community members. There are serious debates about how this is done, by whom, with whom, and with what purpose in mind, and around what benefits there are to art, to the artists, to community members, to the community and to society at large. Yet all community art perspectives develop from a few key principles held in common; a belief in the power of art to impact and inspire, in
humanity’s universal creative capacity, and in the right of all to free and creative expression. Community art seeks to extend opportunities to create to as many people and as divergent a population as possible, and to provide the tools and structure in which to do so. For community artists, art is an integral aspect of daily life. Art is more than the creation of works of beauty, it is a contested and conflicted term closely bound to relations of power: the power to name, the power to express, and the power to make visible.

While community art is a multidisciplinary practice drawing on a wide range of fields, it developed out of two main theoretical schools of thought; a functionalist approach that incorporates art into a wide range of agendas from social change to social work and an ‘art for art’s sake’ approach which sees art as fundamental to the human experience and seeks to democratize art and bring it into daily life. These differing ideological positions have led to the construction of a series of well-worn binaries the most central of which is expressed in the highly debated question: is the process of creation more important than the aesthetic success of the final artistic product? The differing ideological positions that take in this debate have led to differing approaches in practice, deep divisions among community artists and practitioners, and a certain level of frustration around terminology and theory among artists who just want to get on with the work at hand. The struggle to define, legitimate, and explicate itself as a field of practice keeps these binaries active, stagnating the discourse in a struggle over terminology that obfuscates more interesting issues and keeps the field from developing a more complex, and nuanced dialogue.

I have been involved in community art for over 14 years; first sporadically and unexpectedly, then periodically and serendipitously, and for the last 6 years regularly
with a focused intentionality. My community art journey has moved back and forth between Latin America and Canada and incorporates experiences with nine organizations in six countries, all with different foci, methodologies, and purposes. As a community art worker I have been involved with projects and organizations that span the spectrum from ‘art as a tool’ to ‘art for art’s sake’ as well as those that move beyond and through these boundaries.

In 2005, I decided to pursue graduate studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the Sociology and Equity Studies in Education Department. My main motivation for returning to university was to reflect on my practice and to explore how it connected and related to the work of others; to draw on my experiences and to deepen my theoretical understanding of community art. As a practitioner who stumbled into community art work through community development processes and non-formal education projects, I became involved in the activities of community art through small grassroots organizations that were typically and chronically short-staffed and under-resourced. As a result I became involved in the actions of ‘doing’ community art without any points of reference to the broader field of practice. I only knew about the community art projects that I was working on with the organizations I was involved with. Being constantly caught up in ‘doing’ left little time for the thinking, reflecting, and analyzing required to develop a praxis. During the course of my M.A. program I continued to work in community art organizations and projects in Toronto, San José, Costa Rica, and to a lesser extent Chalatenango, El Salvador. This thesis became a praxeological work as I moved back and forth between differing methodologies, practices, and theoretical understandings of community art, engaged my colleagues in discussion and reflection on key issues in the field, and began to apply the new ideas that I was developing in my
ongoing work. Thus I developed my conceptualization of community art through direct experience and refined, challenged, and expanded it through study, research, and reflection during the course of my masters program.

Through this process I have begun to refer to ‘Transformative Community Art’, as the terminology that best identifies both my practice, as well as all community art practice that transcends the dualism that structured community art as a field through engagement in a transformative agenda. ‘Transformation’ is the often stated purpose of community art; some go so far as to state that community art is ‘inherently’ transformational (Lowe, 2002; Pacific, 1998). Placing the qualifier ‘transformative’ into the identifying terminology of the field accomplishes three things; it provides a terminology to identify the current field of practice, it re-articulates community art by distinguishing the method, location and purpose of the practice, and makes visible the three main bodies of conceptual beliefs and ideas that engender the field providing a rich area of inquiry from which to develop a more nuanced discourse.

The purpose of my thesis is to re-articulate community art as a distinct field of practice by developing the concept of transformative community art. This re-visioning of the field embraces a wide range of practices and moves beyond attachment to the ‘founding fields’ of community art and the resulting preoccupation with binaries such as: product/process, self-expression/technique, and ethics/aesthetics that has been limiting and stagnating the discourse. I also propose to contribute to the development of a more complex and nuanced discourse by demonstrating how applying the concept of transformative community art can open up rich areas of inquiry. This thesis is directed to my community; I am eager to enter into a dialogue with my fellow community artists, and community art workers, animators, and practitioners.
To develop my thesis I briefly explore the development of community art as a field of practice and developing discourse and examine the two main generative ideologies that gave rise to community art in order to locate the current discourse. I then develop transformative community art as a concept; demonstrating why it is an appropriate concept for the current field of practice, and explicating the main components of practice that identify it as a distinct field and separate it from other practices. To further illustrate and substantiate the concept of transformative community art, I then analyze an example of a transformative community art project. Finally, I examine challenges and threats to the field of practice as well as strategies for resistance that will assist us to maintain transformative community art’s nature as a radical art practice and agent for social change. To conclude I identify areas for future work by raising a number of issues in the current field of practice. I demonstrate how mobilizing the concept of transformative community art can raise interesting questions and produce new ideas that can contribute to advancing a more textured and productive discourse.

I will ground the discussion and examine, illustrate, and explicate ideas and concepts through examples drawn from a range of community arts projects and organizations, both those that I have been directly involved in and those represented in the literature.
Chapter Two: Locating the Field

In order to understand the need for a re-articulation of community art, it is important to first explore the development of community art as a field of practice and as a developing discourse. An examination of the philosophical frameworks that underlie community art explicates the dichotomy that is at the root of divisions in practice, purpose, and discourse. The failure of the majority of those writing about and practicing community art to clearly identify and locate their work ideologically has led to a confusion of language. Key concepts mobilized in the field such as ‘community’, ‘art’, ‘transformation’, ‘participation’, ‘collaboration’, ‘artistic quality’, and ‘aesthetics’, are used widely yet rarely explicated. Thus community art projects that may look the same on paper due to their framing within similar terminology, may develop very differently on the ground where differences in the meanings applied to these terms are revealed (Pacific, 1999b).

A Brief History of Community Art and its Developing Discourse

While community art as a field of practice and area of academic inquiry is relatively new, the philosophical underpinnings of community art can be traced back to humanity’s earliest forms of collective cultural expression. Deb Barndt (2008), Suzanne Lacy (1995), and Robin Pacific (1999a) remind us that art was integral to community life for most of human history and still is for many communities today. Carol Becker finds parallels with Greek tragedy dating from 420 B.C. (1994b). Pacific and WochenKlausur (www.wochenklausur.at, art section, ¶ 5) note that the main ideas underlying community art arose out of high modernity and have been current for the past 100 years. Arlene Raven (1989) and Jan Cohen-Cruz (2002a) draw particular attention to the political art of
the 1930’s and the Works Progress Administration’s New Deal employment projects for artists; projects that were inspired by the use of art in the Russian Revolution and the 1920’s Mexican Mural Movement.

Contemporary roots for the development of community art are generally traced back 60 years to the later half of the 1900’s, when a rapidly changing socio-political context provided rich conditions for the development of new art forms and practices. In the 1950’s artists challenged the commodification of art and the dominance of art institutions through “Happenings”, the Situationists rejected the separation of art and politics, and Conceptual Art privileged the idea of the art over the art object (Lacy, 1995; www.wochenklausur.at, art section, ¶ 9-10). In the 1960’s, the struggle for civil rights, the anti-war movement, and the rise of identity politics inspired new forms of activist art (Cohen-Cruz, 2002a; Lowe, 2001; O’Donnell, 2006) and in the 1970’s and 80’s marginalized artists, ethnically diverse, feminist, Marxist, and gay artists, challenged the cultural establishment to expand its definition of ‘art’ to include a range of cultural representations and forms beyond the institutionalized Western aesthetic (Ford-Smith, 2001; Lacy). The 1980’s saw a turn toward local cultural production in response to the overwhelming expansion of neoliberalism (locally and globally) and the increasing commercialization of art (Barndt, 2004; Cohen-Cruz). Public school art curriculums were also dismantled in the face of increasing economic pressures on the education system, leading art educators to turn to the community in search of work and thus further expanding artistic programming in communities (Haggar, 2000; Holloway & Krensky, 2001). As reduced services and supports revealed gaping holes in the social fabric, it became apparent that the decline of the social welfare state increased the strain on already marginalized communities. Artists committed to ‘changing the world’ and
interested in making a direct impact on socio-political reality turned toward communities as a site of engagement and practice while funders turned to the arts as a means to support communities in crisis (Barndt; Haiven as interviewed by Kennedy, 2010; O’Donnell).

The forms we currently refer to as community art shot up out of these rich and varied influences in the 1980’s and 90’s (Bishop 2004, 2006a; Raven, 1989). The last 30 years have seen an explosion of community art projects accompanied by new forms and practices, a growing community of practitioners, and a diverse body of writing ranging from ‘how-to’ guides and project descriptions, to histories, pedagogy, theory, and critique. Until recently however, the voice of community art practitioners was not well represented in the literature. Community artists and community art practitioners, workers, and animators are often over-extended, under-funded, and work in extremely localized environments; we³ are people of action, engaged in ‘doing the work’. The organizations and projects we work with and/or through are typically under-staffed, and lacking in necessary resources such as adequate work space and materials. There tends to be limited time and resources for community artists and community art organizations to reflect on our work and to document and disseminate our experiences, ideas, and methodologies. With increasing attention from government bodies, social service programs, post-secondary institutions, and funding agencies however, there has been a marked increase in writing on community art from both artists engaged in the work and a wide and diverse range of stakeholders.

³ My use of the pronoun ‘we’ is in no way meant to convey that community artists and community art workers, animators, and practitioners are a monolithic or homogenous group. I employ the pronoun ‘we’ simply to denote my membership in this diverse community.
The developing community art discourse is incredibly varied due its multidisciplinary appeal. Community art has been written about in fields as diverse as: urban planning (Margulies Breitbart, 1995), sociology (Lowe 2000, 2001), child and youth development (Holloway & LeCompte, 2001; Kahne, Brown, O’Brien, Quinn, & Thiede, 2001), urban education (Holloway & Krensky, 2001), community, adult, or popular education (Barndt, 2001; Scher, 2007), human geography (Mattingly, 2001), civic engagement and democracy (Bacon, Yuen, & Korza, 1999; Korza, Schaffer Bacon, & Assaf, 2005; Krensky, 2001), ethics (Etheridge Woodson, 2009), public space (Bertram, 2008), research methods (Barndt, 2004, 2008), psychology (Greene, 2000; Packard, Ellison & Sequenzia, 2004), urban and rural development (Campbell, 2001), community development (Newman, Curtis & Stephens, 2003), community health (Siegal & Bartley, 2004), and social work (Dutton, 2001). Within the art discourse, articles on community art have been published in the literatures of individual artistic disciplines such as visual arts (Gude, 1989; Marschall, 2002), dance (Lerman, 2002, 2005) and theatre (Brennan, 2002; Cless, 1996; Lev-Aladgem, 2004), in art education (Degge 1987; Green, 1999; Haggar 2000; Lackey, 2003), art criticism (Bishop 2004, 2006a; Cohen-
Cruz, 2002b; Raven, 1995) and aesthetics (Gablik, 1995). As the field develops articles are being published that also fit within the emergent category of community art itself (Ford-Smith, 2001; Pacific, 1998; Salverson, 2004; Thomas & Rappaport, 1996). This review represents only a small sample of the available writing on community art. My aim in providing it is to demonstrate the wide range of interest in community art.

The discourse is developing, expanding, and shifting rapidly as interest continues to grow from diverse sectors and as more people begin to participate in a discourse that is more and more clearly identified as ‘community art’. For example, in her 1995 re-framing of the field ‘Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art’, Suzanne Lacy discusses evaluative criteria and notes that “methods traditionally used to measure change, drawn from the political or social sciences, are never, to my knowledge, actually applied” (p. 45). Lacy continues her discussion by noting that artists are reluctant to reduce a critical evaluation of their work to numbers or personal testimonies. Now, just 15 years later with governments funding community art projects, community-based NGO’s including community art projects in their programming, and a wide range of academic disciplines taking an interest in the field, there has been a push to quantify the personal, social, cultural, civic, and economic impacts of community art. The addition of these pressures and the resulting studies to the discourse has made evaluative criteria and the role and scope of critique hot topics in community art with artists, funders, and social service agencies approaching the topic from quite different perspectives (Cohen-Cruz, 2002b; Lawrence, 2006; Resonance Creative Consulting, 2006). As community art struggles to legitimate itself as a distinct field of practice, the discourse is developing and expanding rapidly. Community art’s multidisciplinary appeal and growing popularity garners input from a wide range of sectors and diverse interests.
Generative Ideologies

The multiple approaches, modalities, goals, and perspectives brought to community art vary greatly according to the ideological underpinnings of those developing the work. While community art developed out of a rich and varied range of multidisciplinary influences and continues to draw on numerous academic fields, two main generative ideologies are directly responsible for its development; ‘art as a tool’, a functionalist approach that incorporates art into a wide range of agendas from social change to social work and an alternate perspective that values ‘art for it’s own sake’ which, developing out of a core belief in art as essential to humanity, seeks to democratize art by making art and art-making widely available to everyone. I also refer to this perspective as ‘art in the community’ as it seeks to bring art out of elite cultural and educational institutions and into the daily life of communities. These two different perspectives undergird the field but are rarely acknowledged or discussed. The lack of clear communication around core beliefs and values has led to divisions within the community art community, in practice, and in discourse.

This division can be seen in the way that different interests took up community art. When community art practice was first developing as an artistic modality, artists had to fight with the established art world to have their work with communities be seen as ‘art’ rather than as social work or education (Salverson, 2004). Coming from the ‘art for it’s own sake’ perspective, they had to fight for the inclusion of ‘community’ in art. Critics had no aesthetic criteria for the new forms that were developing and community art was often dismissed as ‘bad art’. The pain of this rejection and criticism continues to operate in the current discourse. In 1995 Suzanne Lacy laments; “for this [working with communities] they were called ‘community artists’ and critics refused to take their work
seriously” (p. 27). Grant Kester, in a response to critic Claire Bishop’s call for rigorous critique of relational art practices,\(^5\) opines that “the lowest circle of hell in her essay is reserved for the ‘community arts tradition’” (Kester, 2006, ¶ 5). The use of quotation marks around ‘community artists’ and ‘community arts tradition’ are particularly telling; while Kester an art historian and critic, and Lacy an artist and theorist, are both arguing for the relevance and value of community-based art practices, they are keen to distance themselves from the term ‘community art’ due to the negativity it has been imbued with in the art world where it is often synonymous with ‘bad art’. On the other hand the neoliberal state, mobilizing the ‘art as a tool’ perspective, has warmly embraced community art as a way to be seen as addressing urgent social needs with limited capital investment (needs that have been largely exacerbated by their cuts to the welfare state) (Haiven as interviewed by Kennedy, 2010; O’Donnell, 2006). With the increase in government funding for community art the balance has swung the other way. Community artists now struggle to defend the ‘art’ of their work with communities; to keep a focus on aesthetics and form as the balance has swung from product to the side of process. This focus on process privileges issues of collaboration and participation over issues of artistic quality (Salverson). Community artists and community art projects operating from these differing ideological positions has lead to differing practices and divisions within the community art community as is illustrated by the following example.

In the regional community art project *Lo Creo: Proyecto Cultura – Localidad y Creatividad*,\(^6\) five separate organizations from five Central American countries:

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\(^{5}\) Kester was responding to Bishop’s 2006 article ‘The social turn: collaboration and its discontents’

\(^{6}\) ‘I Believe it/I Create it: The Culture - Locality and Creativity Project’. Lo Creo can translate as either ‘I believe it’ or ‘I create it’ and was chosen as a name for the project specifically due to the appeal of this double meaning. Please also note that all Spanish to English translations in this thesis are mine. I was involved with the *Lo Creo* project from its inception in 2002, until the completion of phase II in February 2007. During this period my main participation was with the Costa Rican project where I participated in
Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, implemented a regional community art project. *Lo Creo* is a rich site for exploring and understanding the complexities of community art as this regional project linked the individual country projects within a common theoretical framework and methodological structure. While *Lo Creo* identified common objectives and goals to be attained, each country’s project was interpreted and implemented distinctly depending on the local political, cultural, geographic, social, and economic conditions, as well as the ideological framework and methodological resources of each organization. The differences in ideological approaches became evident at the first regional meeting where the Costa Rican participant *El Centro de Educación Vecinos*, was criticized by the Nicaraguan and Honduran counterparts for ‘low artistic quality’ and also for using ‘bribes’ to achieve high participation numbers in their workshops. While these criticisms may seem harsh and they certainly provoked controversy, hurt feelings, and defensiveness, the division can be easily understood by examining the underlying beliefs of each organization.

The Costa Rican organization *Vecinos* was largely a popular education centre with a strong background in using art to engage and educate communities. For example, they had a wildly successful community theatre group that created and filmed videos on domestic violence, sexual harassment, environmental degradation, and other community concerns. These videos were then used as resources in community education programs.

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7 El Salvador did not participate in phase I of the project
8 The Neighbour’s Education Centre, commonly referred to as *Vecinos*
9 After 26 years of operations *Vecinos* closed December 19, 2008 due to insufficient funds to continue their work.
La Casa de los Tres Mundos the Nicaraguan counterpart and La Casa de la Cultura de Santa Rosa de Copán the Honduran counterpart are essentially cultural centres offering an array of cultural and art education programs. The challenge La Casa de los Tres Mundos and La Casa Cultural de Santa Rosa de Copan were facing was how to engage and involve marginalized neighbourhoods in their excellent artistic and cultural programming. Both organizations had an established methodology to produce high quality artistic work with their students and prioritized artistic merit over social processes. Vecinos as a popular education centre, applied their central philosophy to the project’s artistic workshops and so for example, food was offered at all workshops to offer an informal opportunity to socialize as well as to ensure that hunger was not a barrier to participation. This was the ‘bribe’ referred to by the other counterparts. Faced with trying to unite a Nicaraguan immigrant and Costa Rican national population that were hostile to each other, as well as trying to convince families that art classes were not a ‘waste of time’, Vecinos, while employing professional artists like the other counterparts, emphasized the social process over the aesthetic quality of the product and partnered each artist with a psychologist, social worker or community leader to ensure that the social dynamics of the group were supported. The construction of art as a tool for community development and education had come to rub up against the construct of art in the community where more importance is placed upon proper technique and the resulting product as a work of art with aesthetic merit. Through the 5 years of the project this division continued to be felt and to give rise to issues and points of conflict. During regional meetings a lot of time was spent trying to come up with a common terminology, a shared understanding of key project concepts, and an agreement on important issues. This example demonstrates how these underlying ideological positions can lead to real
differences in practice and deep divisions among community artists. As such, it’s valuable to examine the two generative ideologies more closely. It should be noted that these perspectives are not monolithic and contain a spectrum of practice and philosophical frameworks within themselves.

Art in the Community/Art for its own Sake

The ‘art in the community’ or ‘art for its own sake’ perspective encompasses two broad trajectories. The first of these trajectories is to promote art among the general population through the provision of art education services at the community level. The second trajectory is to provide the general public with an experience of art through the work of a professional artist at the community level where the work created is either placed in or presented to the community. Both approaches are based on a desire to ‘bring’ art, which in the West has been constructed as an elitist occupation, to people and communities who may not have access to artistic products or the tools of artistic expression. This desire is based on the value that artistic expression is central to the human experience and as such everyone should have the opportunity to experience artistic and cultural products and/or have access to the tools of artistic expression. These tools include notions of form, knowledge of a variety of techniques, and access to a range of artistic materials. In each case artists presenting work in communities and community-based art educators share the belief in the importance of the community as a legitimate and vital location for art.

Art Education in the Community

The first perspective, art education in the community, focuses on the development of artistic skills and techniques within a wide cross section of the population. This perspective encompasses all art education activities that occur outside of
standard art educational settings (such as the formal school curriculum, or training for specialized populations of aspiring, emerging, or established artists) and frames them as ‘community art’. Art classes offered at community centers, hospitals, or penitentiaries as well as community outreach activities from formal art establishments such as museums, art galleries, and theatres are all included in this perspective. Art education in the community on the whole attempts to reach as diverse a population as possible, from children to seniors, and encompassing diverse socio-economic and ethnic communities, while specific programs may focus on one population, marginalized youth, seniors in long-term care, newcomer families, etc. Many of these programs have democratizing practices such as pay-what-you-can fee structures to ensure wide participation. Although the more cynical may view outreach activities from the established art world as strictly a self-serving means to develop future paying audiences to purchase their art products, the discourse that surrounds these projects fit them squarely into the belief structure of art in the community.

In this framework community art education is often contextualized as a leisure or recreational activity that individuals choose to engage in as a gratifying way to fill their free time. Lackey marks the relationships between art, education, and leisure in the following way:

In common sense terms “education” occurs in schools, “leisure” is the opposite of work, and “art” fits within the domains of play or recreation rather than work or education. These interrelated conventional understandings are reflected and perpetuated by the ways in which art education has been institutionalized in Western society, remaining a marginal school subject but embraced readily as part of non-school learning environments.” (1994, p. 117, as cited in Haggar 2000, p. 5)

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10 Examples include: Canadian Opera Company’s After School Opera Program, (children create their own mini-opera with professional artist-educators) and The National Ballet of Canada’s T-dot program (a free program providing workshops and art experiences in dance, theatre, opera, and film for youth).
Indeed one of the main factors in the development of *art education in the community* is the de-schooling of art. As public education budgets were slashed and school curriculums became increasingly concerned with preparing students to enter the workforce in an economy increasingly focused on technology, art became a marginalized school subject positioned as a recreational activity even within the school. Community-based art educators interviewed by Haggar stated that art in schools is approached as a “throw-away” subject; as “that thing you do on Friday. That forty-five minutes when you use glue and markers.” (2000, p. 20). Art in the schools has therefore become de-specialized; few schools value art enough to use scarce resources in hiring trained art teachers. As a result the little ‘art’ still taught in public schools is often taught by generalist teachers with no special training in art (Abley, 2000 as cited in Haggar, 2000). Consequently art educators turned to community settings in search of employment in the face of diminishing job opportunities within the schools, leading to the development of ‘community art education’ as a sub-discipline within the field of art education.

The forces behind *art education in the community* including the democratization of art, the de-schooling of art, and art as leisure and recreation are reflected in the motivations of community art educators. Studies of community art educators have found that they identify their role in the community in one of two ways, either as providers of leisure or recreational activities (as in the ‘common sense’ framework outlined by Lackey) or as art teachers providing education in artistic skills, promoting art in the community, and bringing the opportunity for creative expression to a large cross-section

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11 Haggar in her literature review on the de-schooling of art cites sources as early as 1973 on this issue that remains a controversial topic today.
12 In her 1987 study Degge found that almost 68% of the community art teachers she studied desired a career in the formal education system, suggesting that the de-schooling of art was a major factor in these art educators’ decisions to teach in the community. Haggar’s 2000 study supports this finding, concluding explicitly that the de-schooling of art was the number one factor in the decision made by the art educators she studied to teach in the community.
of the population (Degge 1987, Haggar 2000). The community art educators who view themselves in the later role are adamant in their belief that artistic expression is a basic human right that is being denied in the formal education system. They see themselves as filling this gap and are emphatic that their role is not to provide leisure or recreation, but art education. These two very different belief systems (art as recreation and art as essential to the human experience) coexist within the *art education in the community* perspective.

An interesting example of the relationship between schools, art education, and community art is *Art Jam*, a project which got off the ground with an Artist and Community Collaboration Project grant\(^{13}\) in 1998 and ran for 2 years. *Art Jam* was a community art project that offered a wide range of artistic opportunities and programming to the Guelph community including; public and private Art Jams,\(^{14}\) an art-based summer day camp, a community art gallery and the ‘ReKreations Emporium’ which offered unconventional recycled materials with creative potential to schools, camps, and the community at a nominal cost.\(^{15}\) *Art Jam*’s mission was; “to provide a safe, positive, criticism free and FUN environment for individual creative play and learning. We encourage adult and young participants to be brave and in the moment.

\(^{13}\) The grant was a pilot program funded by the Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts and Laidlaw Foundation. Additional funding was secured from OPIRG and Canada Trust Friends of the Environment.

\(^{14}\) ‘Art Jams’, the core of the project’s creative community programming, were sessions in which community members developed art projects using recycled and un-conventional materials over the course of three hours. The resulting art work was presented in ‘guerilla galleries’ throughout the city so everyone could have the experience of stumbling onto unexpected art in the course of their daily lives. Art Jams were available to children, youth, adults, and mixed age groups in the community. There was a weekly public jam where anyone in the community could book a spot and participate for a nominal fee of $5.00. Private Jams for specific events and corporate jams for businesses and organizations were also available.

\(^{15}\) I worked at *Art Jam* for 10 months. While I was involved in all programming aspects of *Art Jam*, my main responsibilities were to develop and run the ReKreations Emporium and the art-based summer day camp, and to provide support at *Art Jam*. 
Extra emphasis is put on employing the individual's imagination.”

(Reprinted with permission from Art Jam, http://www.artjam.org/indexb.html)

Art Jam developed an interesting partnership with the Upper Grand District School Board. In exchange for the use of a vacant school, Art Jam agreed to provide 26 days of art education to classes in the school board following the basic Art Jam model but tailored to meet new art curriculum requirements that had just been introduced at each grade level from kindergarten to grade 8. The following statements from a teacher feedback form are typical of the responses received and give an idea of the reception of the program by educators:

*We had a wonderful time at ART JAM. As a teacher I would love to have regular access to such a program (at least once a month). To learn about ART from people who know, love and feel art is a precious opportunity we can’t pass up.*

*ART JAM is a tremendous opportunity to be able to really implement the new ART curriculum with lots of hands on excitement!*

*ART JAM provides qualified people, the space and the opportunity to do art like it should be done!*  (http://www.artjam.org/forcomment.html)

The references to qualified people, space to work, and a desire for increased access to the program, suggest the marginalized nature of arts education in the school system where teachers are asked to implement a curriculum for which they often have no specialized skills, most likely in their own classrooms with inadequate space and materials to really do the subject matter justice. The School Board outsourced its art education to professional artists running a community art project in exchange for the use of a school building that it was not currently operating. The value assigned to this service by the school board can be seen by the fact that after 2 years, despite the success of Art Jam both as a community-based art educator for their own schools and as a community art
project that enjoyed widespread community support and publicity,\(^{16}\) the school board sold the school that Art Jam operated out of without finding the program an alternative space. Without the crucial support of a heavily subsidized location the project could not support itself, although it tried many creative strategies to do so.

Art Jam was an example of the deschooling of art and the creation of an opportunity for a broader community art project. The *art education in the community* perspective can also be seen operating within community art projects whose overarching perspective may be quite different. Within *Lo Creo* one component of the El Salvador project stood out sharply from the rest of the country projects, as well as from the rest of the El Salvador project itself. *Tiempo Nuevos Teatro*,\(^{17}\) known as TNT has a strong political and social transformation agenda and since 1992 has been an integral part of the communities in which it has been located. In the application of the *Lo Creo* project, TNT chose to develop a modern dance workshop in one community. This workshop was unique within both the regional and TNT’s own country project as it was a ‘straight’ modern dance workshop where participants learned the form and technique of modern dance, an artistic form that had no tradition or exposure within the community. In the project it was typical to adapt art forms to local customs, reality, and needs in order to fuse ‘high art’ forms with folkloric ones. This included the reclaiming of traditional cultural forms, tying into forms that had deep traditions in Latin America like muralism, and incorporating and reinterpreting popular culture representations. TNT’s usual programming is exemplified by their music workshop in which the participants became the church choir. The local church had no organ or piano, so the music workshop relied on the guitar which is a cheap instrument, easily available, wildly popular, and the core

\(^{16}\) Art Jam partners included: The Guelph Aids Committee, The Guelph Multicultural Centre, The Guelph Arts Council, and Guelph OPIRG.

\(^{17}\) New Times Theatre
instrumentation of Latin American music. The participants learned guitar and voice, fulfilled a need in their community, and became a part an institution that enriched the lives of their families while increasing community social attachment. In contrast, the modern dance workshop was a new art form that had to be introduced to the community. Males had to be encouraged to take part in an art form they at first saw as ‘feminine’. The community function served by the modern dance workshop and the benefits derived from participating in it were less clear than they were in the music workshop. Outside of the workshop, what would youth do with their modern dance skills? How would knowledge of modern dance serve them in their daily life in rural El Salvador? The modern dance workshop was the result of the desire to democratize art, to teach an elite art form; the form, technique, and discipline to marginalized youth.\textsuperscript{18} Here we can see the expression of the generative perspective art education in the community in a project that reaches far beyond art education, a project with a much broader mandate firmly situated in community, social, and political change.

\textit{Art education in the community} is concerned with individuals acquiring the skills and techniques to express themselves through an artistic form. The overarching idea is that art is essential to humanity and so it is important to teach people how to express themselves using it. This generative perspective holds that any art education activity offered outside of the traditional setting of the school at any level of skill or engagement whether for aesthetic or recreational purposes, is community art. In this understanding, community art is neither a tool to be used to affect change, nor a transformative social,\textsuperscript{18} This kind of program is greatly prized by funders who seem to see something heartwarming in impoverished children learning an ‘elite’ art form like ballet or opera. A disturbing civilizing discourse can run through this perspective. Why prize one art form above others? Why is bringing opera to the masses interpreted differently than bringing say, circus? Circus is an accessible form easily transferable to income generation through busking and party entertainment. Is there a social improvement agenda lurking underneath teaching the ‘civilized’ arts to the underprivileged?
cultural, political, or artistic practice. Rather community art is an *educational or recreational* option that individuals can choose to pursue for their personal gratification, personal development, and to support their personal expression.

**Art for the Community**

*Art for the community* is the ‘delivery’ of art to a community by a professional artist or artists. The artist in fulfilling their artistic vision chooses to place or present their art in the sphere of the community rather than the sphere of art and culture institutions. Underlying belief systems can be the democratization of art, bringing art to the masses, or simply an artist’s desire to take on the challenges and opportunities presented by creating art that comes into contact with a broader public in unconventional locations. Some examples of site-specific public art fit this model; art that is commissioned, designed, and installed without input or collaboration with the community. This form of *art in the community* can cause conflict if the community does not actually desire or value the art. As Arlene Raven asks, “does art in the public interest really interest the public?” (1989, pp. 1-2).

One of the most notorious examples of this kind of public art is Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* (1981). *Tilted Arc* was government funded and the design was commissioned and approved by a panel of art professionals. It was installed in New York’s Federal Plaza to widespread hostility from the public who had to interact with it in the course of their daily lives. The piece, a slightly curved and slightly tilted 3.5 meter tall wall 36.5 meters long made of steel, cut across the plaza deliberately blocking the building from the street. Serra’s goal was to inscribe new meaning on the space and to force the public

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19 This segment focuses on site-specific public art as an example of *art for the community*: however any form of professional artist taking their art out of institutions and presenting it in communities fits into this perspective. Dusk Dances, an organization that “brings high quality contemporary and traditional dance to public parks” (http://www.duskdances.ca/en/about.php) is another good example.

20 Data for this summary was taken from Robert Storr’s ‘Tilted Arc: Enemy of the People?’ (1995).
to interact with the sculpture. The public reacted with outrage; workers in the buildings surrounding the plaza found the sculpture to be an unwelcome obstacle to navigate on their way to and from work, as the steel wall began to rust, people found it unsightly (although this was an intended interaction between sculpture and environment), it became a target for graffiti, and some framed it as a security threat as it limited the visibility of security personnel. The sculpture provoked letters to newspapers, a petition, and 3 days of public hearings. In 1985 the decision was made to relocate the sculpture. Serra argued that the sculpture was site-specific and that "to remove the work is to destroy it" (Weyergraf-Serra & Buskirk 1991 as cited by Deutsche, 1996, p. 260). In 1989 the sculpture was removed after 8 years of controversy and debate. While the Tilted Arc can be seen as unsuccessful (it did not meet the Art in Architecture Program’s goal to “create a lasting cultural legacy for the people of the United States”(22) it did spark a public debate on the role of art in society, engage a wide range of stakeholders in that discussion, and highlight the tensions between the interests and goals of artists, the public, and government.

Art for the community can have lofty civic goals like the Art in Architecture Program’s or it can have innovative artistic goals as Serra did, but without community collaboration, consultation, public awareness, and education programs(23) it can work against its objectives and have an alienating effect, further estranging art from the general public. Art in the community including art education in the community and art for the

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22 “The GSA Art in Architecture Program oversees the commissioning of artworks for new federal buildings nationwide. These artworks enhance the civic meaning of federal architecture and showcase the vibrancy of American visual arts. Together, the art and architecture of federal buildings create a lasting cultural legacy for the people of the United States.” (http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104456)
23 Storr outlines examples of public education activities that could have been implemented to increase the community’s acceptance of Tilted Arc including providing literature, organizing guided visits to the work, and holding concerts around the work (which was found to provide good acoustics).
community is one of the generative ideologies that led to the development of today’s community art. The entrance of artists and art educators into the community due to the de-schooling of art, the aim of democratizing art, the desire to develop innovative art forms, and a belief in the universal creative capacity of humanity began a rapprochement between art and daily life in the West that has developed into the field of practice currently known as community art.

Art as a Tool

The art as a tool perspective conceptualizes community art largely as a means to an end. This perspective operates in many popular education or personal and community development processes. The two main interpretations of this perspective are: art as a tool for social change, a technique used to advance positive social change, and art as social work, where community art programs are developed and implemented with goals of ameliorating personal and social problems, such as increasing self-esteem in young women or preventing social ills such as violence and drug abuse. What unites these perspectives is a functionalist approach to art that recognizes art’s power to engage people, to communicate ideas, and to provoke fresh perspectives that mobilize the energy necessary to achieve political, social, or personal development goals. The Community Arts Network (CAN), a comprehensive online resource for community art, takes this approach and highlights it in the organization of its resources. CAN’s website presents documentation regarding criticism/theory, history, infrastructure, policy, and working methods with respect to the following categories: discipline (dance, media arts, music,

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24 I use the term ‘social work’ to denote programming developed and implemented for the purpose of addressing individual problems and social ills.

25 The Community Arts Network was active from July 1999 to April 2010, when it was unable to secure support for its ongoing operations. On September 6, 2010 the site was archived at http://wayback.archive-it.org/2077/20100906194747/http://www.communityarts.net/ with the support of Indiana University. While active CAN published 10,000 pages of information, research, and critical dialogue from those engaged in the field, making it an important resource for community art. CAN currently maintains an active Facebook page for ongoing dialogue.
visual arts, literature/narrative, theatre/performance art, public art), populations (elders, international, rural, youth, urban), and social contexts (activism, community development, corrections, cultural democracy, education, environment, health, spirituality). The organization of material in this manner helps direct people accessing the site to the most relevant resources for their chosen population, artistic discipline, or social purpose. In other words the CAN is committed to offering resources that help one choose the right tool for the right job.

*Art as a Tool for Social Change*

In the *tool for social change* conceptualization, art with the community is seen as an effective technique to engage particular populations for the purpose of specific aims. Community art projects or creative processes are often carried out within a larger course of action such as community development or political actualization that contains numerous methods. One such example would be to raise awareness of environmental problems in the community among school children through a play developed and performed by community members. This play could be one component of a large-scale campaign developed within the community around the environment including: community clean-ups, organizing a community environmental committee, tree planting, etc. In this example community art is a technique within a larger process that is ‘community development’ rather than ‘community art’. An artistic discipline is chosen (theatre) to communicate to and impact on a specific population (school children) with a specific goal in mind (educate about the environment to effect environmentally conscious behaviour).
My first exposure to community art practices was through this conceptualization of community art. *El Instituto para la Promoción Humana*, commonly referred to as *INPHRU*, works in Nicaragua to support and empower children in and on the streets. After several years of work in Managua with street children in the markets and other communal locations, INPHRU decided to shift their focus to strengthen and support the communities from which most of the street children came. Their goal in pursuing this line of action was to reduce the number of children living on and working in the street, reuniting them with their families and communities. This required improving the quality of life of children, youth, and families living in situations of extreme difficulty. The project in the communities of ‘Las Torres’ and ‘Hilario Sanchez’ (where I volunteered for 8 months in 1996) employed multiple strategies including; a free community school (which also provided jobs for youth who had graduated and returned as teachers), micro-lending programs for parents, job skill development programs for children and youth (screen printing, bakery, etc), support groups for survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation, and a recreation program. Over the years, within the initiative there were various artistic projects: a music program, a muralism group, and a children’s puppetry group. During my time with INPHRU, among other tasks, I worked with the children’s puppetry group who were developing a play to educate the neighbourhood about the prevention of malaria and dengue fever. The children considered and discussed the educational material and then turned it into a puppet performance for their friends and families. The puppetry group was an effective way to ensure that the message was spread throughout the community in a fun rather than didactic way. Community members of all ages attended the performances to see their friends, children, brothers, sisters, cousins,

26 The Institute for Human Advancement
etc. perform. The puppetry group served a number of important functions. The children were engaged and had fun which kept them active in the program and provided them with a safe environment away from the streets. While they also learned new skills such as sewing and storytelling, mainly they learned about issues important to the neighbourhood and communicated them to the broader community. Participation in the group provided the children with positive adult role models, raised their self-esteem and strengthened the social fabric of the neighbourhoods as the community came together for the performances and saw their children engaged in positive and productive activities.

Learning about the art of puppetry beyond what was necessary to convey the message, was not the goal. There were no professional artists working on the project, the children did not learn different styles of puppetry or even how to make puppets. To educate their audience, they manipulated muppet-like hand puppets. The puppetry group had personal, social, and community development goals, not artistic ones. The puppetry group itself was just one of many activities within the overall structure of a community development project aimed at reducing the number of street children in Managua through improving the quality of life of the city’s most ‘at-risk’ neighbourhoods. Creating ‘art’ was not the goal.

This is a common approach to the arts often employed in popular education practices or community art projects devised out of a popular education perspective. Artistic practices such as theatre, murals, and storytelling are valued for their power to engage, inspire, and capture people’s attention. Art serves as a ‘vehicle’ for analyzing social issues, exploring possible solutions, and communicating the results of the process to the larger community. The importance of the final product lies in its ability to be used as a tool to raise awareness, inspire action, spread the message, etc. The value of the
product as a tool outweighs the artistic merit of the product. In the example used above, it is more important that the community learn the lesson presented in the puppet show (i.e. how to prevent malaria and dengue) than producing a show of artistic merit (innovative script, original puppet design, exceptional acting, effective puppet manipulation), or developing artistic skills within the community. This “technique” approach to community art is widespread and is one of the main reasons for the multidisciplinary nature of the community art literature. Community art conceptualized this way is a vehicle, a means to an end, rather than its own process and field of practice.

Art as Social Work

Art as social work, a prevalent formulation of community art that is especially popular with funders and government programs, conceives of community art as a way to address personal problems or prevent social ills. Art activities are framed as a way to, for example, prevent youth from being involved in ‘high-risk’ activities by positively structuring their free-time, assisting them to express themselves, and providing a space to safely experiment with different behaviours. Art is a ‘vehicle’ in the sense of transporting the youth from ‘high-risk’ to ‘resilience’.

Programs such as arts apprenticeships, arts classes, and theatre troupes have been shown to produce many positive results including lower dropout rates, higher college attendance rates, less juvenile crime, less recidivism, positive anger expressions, better interpersonal skills, and higher self-esteem (www.artsusa.org/education/youth.html as cited Dutton, 2001 p. 44).

The main focus in this perspective is on the process rather than product. A 2001 article by Susanne Dutton published in the journal ‘Social Work with Groups’ clearly exemplifies this viewpoint. In Dutton’s article on using theatre with urban youth, she states her main goals for her pre-teen drama group as; “to provide a vehicle for youth to learn to work together and gain a sense of group identity and pride”, and “to provide a
forum that would serve to enhance the decision making skills of the members of the group” (p. 46). The author states that the final piece that was shown to a ticket-purchasing public was NOT a polished piece of theatre (p. 53) and that this did not matter. Dutton hopes that her article will encourage and inspire more social workers and youth workers to incorporate the arts into their work and clearly states that it is not important to have any artistic skills to do so. She explains that you do not have to be an expert when creating programs for children and adolescents; you just “need to be interested and know enough to help youth grow” (p. 54). One of Dutton’s ‘lessons learned’ sums up one of the main ideas in the art as social work perspective;

view the arts as a vehicle not as an outcome. The final piece, whether it be a play, a musical piece, or a dance, does not have to be polished or even done. Going through the process is a very important part of this kind of group (p. 54).

In both art as a tool for social change and art as social work, art is subordinated to a greater purpose. The countless end uses for art in personal and social amelioration processes as well as in social change agendas contributes to the proliferation of articles on ‘community art’ across a wide range of disciplines sometimes making it hard to ‘locate’ the field. The functionalist approach to art mobilized through these perspectives generated widespread interest in the power of art to affect change in communities and populations often denied access to art.

The field of practice that has come to be known as community art developed and grew out of the two distinct perspectives: art in the community (with its components of art education in the community and art for the community) and art as a tool (with its main areas of emphasis of art as a tool for social change and art as social work). But the

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27 This leads me to wonder about the differences in programming and outcomes between this kind of group which has a focus on social processes, and groups developed with an art education in the community perspective that are taught by professional artists but have a focus on the development of artistic skills and techniques.
current field of practice has expanded beyond these perspectives, incorporating elements of these ideologies, re-interpreting and extending them to create an area of inquiry and practice distinct from the fields of art education, popular education, social work, and public art. While these areas provided the genesis for community art and their influences can still be seen within the current field of practice, community art has developed to become its own complex and multidimensional practice.

**Reflections on Terminology and Language**

As a multidisciplinary field, it is not surprising that there has been a great deal of confusion around language and terminology in the community art discourse. At the 2011 Premier’s Award for Excellence in the Arts, I was struck by dancer and composer David Earle’s acceptance speech for the Individual Artist Award. He said he was literally speechless, first quite humbly because when he saw who the finalists were he concluded he would not win and so had not prepared anything, but secondly because his life’s work has been to communicate emotions through the body and he felt he could not adequately express himself in words. Each art form has its own language (Goodman, 1976 as cited in Greene, 1986). In the community art field we come from a diverse range of disciplines and therefore a diverse range of languages. How can we form a common discourse for our practice when many of us feel more comfortable communicating through nonverbal art forms? These expressive languages do not necessarily translate easily or comfortably to the written or spoken word. Artists who express themselves in colour, sound, line, movement, words, electronic media, etc. are all involved in community art and contributing to this dialogue. Not only are we referencing different expressive languages, we are referencing different academic and professional languages as well. This diversity
is enhanced as art administrators, theorists, critics, and academics, not to mention funders, social services, and government agencies contribute to the discourse.

Currently funders and academia are driving much of the dialogue. Funders have the resources to bring their grantees together for conferences at which they can set the agenda for the conversation. The proliferation of university programs in the area of community art is also influencing the discourse. When Adams and Goldbard completed their review of the field in the United States in 2001, they found formal community art training to be almost non-existent. In 2004, when the Community Arts Network conducted a follow-up study to review changes in the field, they found thirty degree programs in the United States and the United Kingdom (Frye Burnham, Durland, & Gard Ewell). Academics, and those practitioners like me who are privileged enough to be able to find the time and resources to return to university, have the time to document, to study, and to reflect. Community artists and community art workers, practitioners, and animators working from small, under-staffed, resource strapped community art organizations, lack the time to write about their methodologies, ideologies and practices, therefore they do not have an equal opportunity to contribute to the dialogue.

It is therefore not surprising that a ‘common language’ or even a consistent manner of defining and applying terminology has not been found. A lack of clarity in language has led to much of the confusion and conflict around what community art is, how it should be carried out, what constitutes ‘good’ community art, and what its end goal should be. Robin Pacific’s Laidlaw study attempted to cast some light on this issue; to explain how two community art projects can use the same terminology and look almost identical on paper but be vastly different on the ground based on the different motivations, visions, and goals that drive them. Ten years after Pacific identified this
issue for the community art ‘community of practice’; confusion regarding terminology and a lack of clear language still plague the field.

Although forging a new and clear terminology is difficult, I believe it is worthwhile. A new language is needed in order to re-inscribe the conversation so that it is of interest, relevance, and service to community artists and community art workers. Such a language would help us to truly understand each other’s practice, increase the exchange of information, and allow for meaningful critique and evaluation. My interest here is in moving the conversation forward beyond the old conservative binaries. This would reduce the conflict and confusion caused when we use the same words to signify different concepts and help to resist cooptation by conservative forces looking to tame a radical practice for social change into ‘feel good art’. How then can we accomplish this? As Honour Ford-Smith asks, “what language, then, can art that is political and participatory invoke in its defense?” (2001, p. 20).

Developing the concept of transformative community art is my attempt to begin to respond to the need for new terminology that both consolidates the field and defends its radical agenda. Identifying the field as ‘transformative’ speaks to the critical role that community art can play in challenging and changing our social, cultural and civic structures. It resists the bland ‘feel-good’ art that many funders and government agencies are looking for. Referring to the field as ‘transformative’ reinforces the history and intention of the field as a radical force for social change and innovative art-making. It also allows us to shift the conversation to new ground: to focus on transformation moves us away from the false dichotomies of process/product and their related binaries inherited from community art’s distinctive contributory fields. As well, the focus on transformation identifies the field as something distinct from those innocuous community
cultural activities that some private and public forces promote. Such activities in effect
tame the field and distract us from social justice work.

Honour Ford-Smith’s suggestion to “survive manipulation and command
support” is to develop a hybrid critical language based on “assessing art as a mode of
cultural intervention and not as a naturally constituted practice based on autonomous
self-referential languages.” (p. 25). Ford-Smith is suggesting a new multidisciplinary
way to think and talk about art and its social and cultural functions. She is asking us to
abandon the silos of our artistic disciplines and the insular and mediated environment of
galleries and museums and to develop a new language to explore the powerful role that
art can play in cultural production. If, as Thomas King suggests, stories are all we are
(2003) community art can be a powerful force of cultural intervention to challenge
dominant cultural narratives, and tell different stories about ourselves, especially for
those communities facing social, cultural, political and/or economic exclusion (Thomas
& Rappaport, 1996). Community art as a discipline must also begin to tell a new story
about ourselves; a story about a critical transformative practice for social change and art-
making that will strengthen and consolidate our field, preserve our radical mandate, and
serve us to resist the manipulation and de-politicization of our discipline.

While there are definite benefits to academia’s interest in community art, it is
important that community artists and community art workers develop a language to drive
the discourse and reflect the core values of our own practice rather than relying on
language ‘supplied’ by funders and academia. It is important that we invest time in
developing a more nuanced, complex, and hybrid language so that we can communicate
about our practices, discuss important issues, and share with each other. In this way we
can resist cooptation and labeling by conservative forces looking to tame a radical practice for social change.

**The Construction of Binaries and Stagnation in the Discourse**

As a field of practice developing out of distinct discourses and value structures, mainly *art as a tool* and *art for its own sake*, community art has attempted to forge disparate elements into a whole without paying sufficient attention to the development of a nuanced hybrid language to explicate the field. The attempt to contain the multiplicity of views and ideas into one field, and simultaneously struggle to legitimize and define that field as valid art worthy of aesthetic critique and theory, and as an effective method to effect socio-political change, has resulted in the stagnation of discourse as the two main generative ideologies of the field struggle for dominance. As a result, community art in its development, its conceptualization and its terminology has been constituted as a series of binaries with the social change and artistic agendas rubbing up against each other; sometimes pushing for new, hybrid, and complex language, forms and theoretical constructs, but more often reinforcing the dichotomy, entrenching divisions in the community art community, and emphasizing differences in practice.

It is important to address the binaries because as Honour Ford-Smith observes “binaries rarely apportion value equally. They are accompanied by the apportioning of greater power to one side of the binary” (2001, p.71). This unequal conferring of power is what keeps the struggle over the binaries active; there is something to gain and something to lose. If both sides of the binary were recognized as equally important and valid, either in different projects or at different points within a single community art project, the issue would collapse in on itself and disappear. But community art was constructed on a binary and the emphasis of one part over another has been used to
define the field and the work undertaken, so the power to name and to define the field of practice, keeps the dichotomy active.

The main dichotomy at the heart of the practice is a functionalist approach versus an artistic approach which is often expressed as process/product. Is the process undertaken more important than any resulting artistic product? Or does the aesthetic ‘success’ of the finished product justify limitations in the process such as restricting participation or the use of colour palettes? This dualism emanates directly from the generative ideologies that undergird the field. As we have seen on the process side, art as a tool focuses on the group and personal processes occurring in community art programming. On the product side, art in the community emphasizes creating an aesthetically successful artistic product. All other binaries taken up in the community art discourse (ethics/aesthetics, self-expression/technique, collectivity/individuality, facilitator/artist, reclaiming culture/reinventing culture, etc.) originate in these ideologies and are thus derivatives of the product/process binary.\(^{28}\)

There have been multiple attempts to try to address these dichotomies by developing various models, schemata, or terminology. For example; in an earlier unpublished paper (McLeod, 2005) I emphasized a spectrum model to allow for increased flexibility so that a community art project could emphasize the product or the process to a greater or lesser extent at different points in its trajectory. The VIVA! Project\(^{29}\) renamed the binaries as ‘creative tensions’ or dialectics in order to emphasize them as dynamic rather than static. When during the course of their discussion project members felt there was still a tendency to see the ‘tensions’ as dualisms, a spiral model

\(^{28}\) As community art is located within the socio-political structures of society, binaries located in larger societal and cultural constructs are often also examined in the field (personal/political, local/global, public/private, diversity/equity, mind/body, critical/spiritual, human/environment, etc.)

\(^{29}\) The VIVA! Project was developed in 2003 to explore the creative tensions in community art and popular education in the Americas through collaborative participatory action research (VIVA! Project, 2005).
was proposed to suggest a process whereby the creative tensions are transformed into a more holistic and integrated form.\textsuperscript{30} Others, frustrated by the continuing process/product debate have suggested a re-framing of the terminology whereby product and process simply become subsumed into the category of ‘art’. At the Art at the Hub symposium, Ruth Howard, Founder and Artistic Director of Jumblies Theatre, put forward a model that both broadened the definitions of product and process, as well as ultimately subsuming them. In Howard’s model the making of the art or the process (research and development, relationship building, the creative process used to develop the product, etc.) and the products of the process (the physical representation of the work, shared memories, transformed relationships, changes in people and the community, the legacy of the project, etc.) are \textit{all} the art. In her framing the people that artists work with are the medium that art is made out of. Therefore all activities with people, usually seen as ‘process’, are art, as are all of the ‘products’ which includes everything that has been made and changed by the process.\textsuperscript{31}

This re-framing is interesting because it recognizes social and personal change as products, shifting them out of the category of process and expanding the category of ‘product’. The product/process dichotomy exists within relatively narrow definitions of product and process. If product is understood as everything made during a community art process; then changed social relations are as much of a product as the play, mural, video, etc. that is produced. If we extend process to include the impacts and long term effects from the work, the product becomes subsumed into the process. The sculpture, for example, produced is not the end product, it is just another point along the process. The

\textsuperscript{30} The Spiral Model was proposed at the Second Regional VIVA! meeting by Deborah Barndt
\textsuperscript{31} Ruth Howard presentation in small group ‘Art Makes a New Commons’ at the Art at the Hub Symposium, March 20, 2008. A brief summary of this model is outlined in Resonance Creative Consulting Partners, 2008, p. 6.
sculpture is installed in the community and continues to impact those who encounter it. How does it impact community members? Effect passerby? Does the sculpture impact on those who did not participate in making it? By broadening our categories, the product/process divide collapses and both aspects begin to occupy the same space as part of the same trajectory. Although this is a seductive framework it still hews to the process/product construction, which I believe community art must transcend in order to truly explicate our practice.

Binaries and the attempt to deny them, recognize them, address them, change them, and transform them have stifled community art discourse. As a new field of practice we need to develop a more complex and nuanced language of hybridity. Adapting our language, clearly stating our traditions and ideological positions, developing clear terminology, broadening our definitions, being more intentional in our language, and adopting a longer, more inclusive vision recognizes the complexities and differing motivations in our work while advancing the discourse.

The binaries are tenacious because they serve the function of linking us to the roots of our practice; we need to be able to explore and understand these major generative ideological roots and their impact on our work and our field. However mobilizing them as a way to define our field of practice only serves to divide artists and practitioners, isolate forms of practice, and bind us in an uninteresting conversation. Embracing a concept like Transformative Community Art, which I develop in the next chapter, allows for the definition of a distinctive discipline, while allowing for flexibility and a wide range of practice.
Chapter Three: Transformative Community Art - A Re-Articulation of the Field

In her essay ‘Agoraphobia’, an examination of public space, aesthetics, and democracy, Rosalyn Deutsche explores anxieties around ‘public art’. She observes that uncertainty around what public art is, should be, or to what uses it should be put to has translated “into a mandate to define the category” (1996, p. 280). Techniques to redefine the category include shifting the emphasis back and forth between the terms ‘public’ and ‘art’ which, without a rigorous critique of what is meant by ‘public’ and ‘art’, only serves to underline and re-inscribe standard dichotomies, and coining new terminology in an attempt to shift the discourse away from this central dualism that has been consuming the field for over thirty years (p 279 – 281). The same dynamics outlined by Deutsche in the public art discourse plague the community art discourse. The previous chapter explored the binaries created by ‘shifting the emphasis’ between ‘community’ and ‘art’, while the following section addresses developing new terminology.

Currently the field of socially-collaborative art is awash with terminology: socially engaged art, community-based art, dialogic art, littoral art, artist/community collaborations, artist-in-community residencies, community cultural development, participatory, relational, interventionist, research-based, collaborative, or community art (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Bishop, 2006a; Brennan, 2002; O’Donnell, 2006). Many artists working in the public sphere or community environments have coined new terms for their work in order to re-orient the conversation, re-frame a body of work, or highlight the main distinguishing features of their practice. Examples of this are Suzanne Lacy’s coining of ‘new genre public art’ to re-frame the field and distinguish work based on engagement from ‘public art’ (1995) and Darren O’Donnell’s development of ‘social acupuncture’ to define work focusing on public discourse between strangers (2006).
There have also been attempts to demarcate the boundaries of different forms of practice within these larger categories. For example in Robin Pacific’s ‘Initiatives in Cultural Democracy’, an examination of the community art field in Canada, the United States, Britain, and Australia, she names seven models of community art that are based on different ideological frameworks as well as identifying five project modalities in order to highlight real differences in practice (1999b). Through this report Pacific presents an overview of ‘community art’ in 4 countries over a 30 year period and attempts to make the real differences in philosophy and practice visible by developing a new classification system and adding twelve new terms to the discourse.

Taking into account the existing range of terms and the confusion that has ensued from attempts to re-name and re-define the range of practices in the broad area of ‘socially-collaborative art’, it is daunting to add yet another classification system, and yet another new name to the discourse. What is my justification for adding a new category and new terminology to this field of practice that is so clearly struggling to legitimize and explicate itself through an avalanche of terms? It was my own confusion over and dissatisfaction with the existing categories that led me to re-classify numerous projects as either ‘art in the community’ or ‘art as a tool’. I was compelled to develop the concept of transformative community art for three main reasons. First, I have not yet found an existing conceptualization or framework that allows for the issues and concepts I am interested in discussing to be explicitly framed. Second, I want to transcend the limiting binaries that underlie the field. And third, I want to develop a concept of community art that allows for a broad range of practice while still allowing community art to define itself as a category distinct from other forms of art or civic engagement. Without these elements the community art discourse will continue to be stifled in a debate around minor
issues instead of focusing on more relevant and pressing issues like the very real threat of co-optation, the troubling issues around funding, and the pros and cons of institutionalisation. In developing the concept of transformative community art I want to begin to answer Honour Ford-Smith’s call,

for an increasingly hybrid definition of community and community arts, one that allows for diversity of practice, rigorous critique of practice and that challenges the essentially conservative dichotomy between professional and amateur and between product and process by including more inter-sectoral dialogue between diversely positioned artists and communities (2001, p.13).

**Transformative Community Art: Developing the Concept**

Transformative Community Art (T.C.A.) is the term that I am proposing to conceptualize the emerging field of community art practice. By developing and employing this concept I aim to distinguish Transformative Community Art as a distinct practice separate from its roots in popular education, personal and social welfare programs, art education, and public art as well as other practices that have developed out of these and other roots that have made use of similar terminology. Placing the qualifier ‘transformative’ into the identifying terminology of the field shifts community art from the dualism on which it was built by proposing a series of complex relationships between the three components of practice that delineate the field. How can art be transformed through its practice in or with the community? How can communities be transformed through art and art-making? What does a transformational art practice in or with the community look like? Transformative Community Art recognizes and expands the goals of the practice (transformation both social and cultural, art-making, community-making), the location and methodology of working (in the community, with the community, for the community, from the community), and the methods by which the work is undertaken (art-making, community processes). Mobilizing Transformative
Community Art as a concept will allow us to develop a new terminology through which to understand our practice and deepen our discourse.

In the following section I will substantiate the concept of Transformative Community Art through an examination of the use of the concept of transformation within the community art discourse. I will also demonstrate that Transformative Community Art is an effective term to re-articulate the field, clarifying the distinctions between Transformative Community Art and other practices commonly conflated with it.

*Why Transformative Community Art?*

The concept of transformation has often been linked to community art. Holloway and Krensky (2001) outline three predominant perspectives through which art has been viewed: civilizing (“promoting the general welfare of humanity and society”, the formation of character, and the maintenance of democracy and a just society), romantic (“the expression of emotion through inspiration…leads to self discovery and self-definition”), and transformative (that integrates the previous two perspectives and transcends them with the imagination as the catalyst for social change) (pp. 357-358). Holloway and Krensky ground the transformative perspective in Dewey’s notion that “the first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations for a better future are always found in works of art” (1934, pp. 345-346). The transformative perspective takes into account how people use art to redefine themselves and resist oppressive social forces. Holloway and Krensky name community-based art education as one of five forms of transformative art education.

Extrapolating from their model, Seana Lowe (2002) locates community art as one approach to transformative art. Lowe highlights participatory design, the popularization of art, the creative potential of humanity, the right to creative expression,
and anti-cultural elitism as the main ideas in her formulation of community art as a transformative process. In 2000 she stated that community art is “capable of transforming social realms” (p. 381). In 2001 she wrote that that “community art compels personal and social transformation” and adds another term to the discourse by referring to ‘transformational community-based art programs’ (p. 469). In 2002 she posited that community art is ‘inherently’ transformational because it “results in social change by challenging the normative boundaries of the status hierarchy in the traditional art world through its collaborative art-making process” (p. 9).

In her 1999 review of the community art field in Canada, the United States, England, and Australia, Robin Pacific identifies ‘the transformation model’ as one of seven perspectives of community art that she encountered. Pacific traces the ideology of the transformative model of community art to Gramsci, locating it within his concept of ‘organic intellectuals’. Pacific emphasizes Gramsci’s inquiry into the role of cultural institutions and infrastructures in communities and his argument for organizational models capable of transforming individuals from passive objects to active subjects. This thought has been “extrapolated by a model of community art which fosters the transformation of whole communities (both geographical and ‘of interest’), providing a sense of identity and power to groups through their active participation and collaboration in a creative process” (p. 3).

In their 2001 review of the community art field in the United States, Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard, while recognizing the range and diversity of practices,

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32 Pacific’s study attempts to document the field of community art in Canada, the United States, Australia, England. To do this she examined the development of community art in each country, documented the philosophical frameworks underlying the varying projects called community art, and outlined differences in practice. Pacific identifies models along a varied ideological spectrum from highly subversive (The Opposition Model), to bland multiculturalism (The Pluralism Model [This is a Benetton Ad]) that blurs questions of power and difference, to rank co-optation [The Neoconservative Model (Beat them Up, then Sell them the Bandaid)] where social infrastructures are dismantled and essential social services provided by volunteers and community members with ‘experts’ wielding the true power.
models, themes, and methods within the field, begin to develop some elements of a
to theory of ‘community cultural development’, They, like myself, are interested in
lege the field. To this purpose they identify shared
values, ‘unifying principles’, and ‘core purposes’ in which transformation is a key
concept. The notions that “culture is an effective crucible for social transformation” and
that “artists have roles as agents of transformation” (p. 14) are two of their unifying
principles. Their core purposes outline six central beliefs about the nature of the social
transformation that community cultural development seeks to advance.

Aside from these more developed frameworks of transformation in community
art, the term ‘transformation’ abounds in the literature. In her introduction to ‘New Genre
Public Art: Mapping the Terrain’, Suzanne Lacy and the artists she quotes use the words

‘Transformation’ is widely referred to in project descriptions and reviews of the field
(Brennan, 2002; Krensky, 2001; Mattingly, 2001; Scher, 2007). It is also a key concept
that structures research and work in community art projects such as Americans for the
Arts’ Animating Democracy project (Korza, Schaffer Bacon, & Assaf, 2005), The City
Repair Project (2006), and Austrian artists’ collective WochenKlausur
(www.wochenklausur.at). Clearly ‘transformation’ is a concept that is mobilized in and
resonates with the community art community. And while the term ‘transformation’ has
often been linked with community art, there has been limited reflection on issues such as
exactly what is being transformed, how the transformation takes place, and how we know
that the transformation has happened.

Throughout this paper I interchange terminology as applicable. While I will sometimes use the
terminology that theorists and practitioners use when describing their own work (i.e., Suzanne Lacy’s ‘new
genre public art’ and Adams and Goldbard’s ‘community cultural development’), I will also sometimes
refer to their work as T.C.A. in the course of developing, mobilizing, and applying my framework.
Within the ideological construct of Transformative Community Art there is room for a wide range of practice. In addition to investigating and/or developing ideological constructs that form the basis of transformative community art, Pacific (1999b), Holloway and Krensky (2001), Adams and Goldbard (2001), and Lowe (2002) all examine or develop modalities of transformative community art. How might this work be carried out? What would it look like? What methodologies and frameworks would be employed? Pacific outlines five ‘project modalities’ to reflect a range of community art practices: community economic development, community organizing, artists–in-community residencies, collaborative projects, and combination projects that incorporate elements of more than one of the previous modalities. Holloway and Krensky examine four different perspectives that could guide community-based transformative art education projects: feminist, empathic, critical, and multicultural art education (while recognizing the range of multicultural perspectives from surface tokenism to social reconstructionist multicultural education). Adams and Goldbard identify five program models (structured learning, dialogues, documentation and distribution, claiming public space, and residencies) and four themes and methods (history, identity, cultural infrastructure, and organizing). Pacific, Holloway and Krensky, and Adams and Goldbard all emphasize that their formulations are broad, compatible and not necessarily discreet. Elements from each of Pacific’s modalities could be combined in numerous ways, Adams and Goldbard note that “any of the program models we describe might employ any of the themes and methods outlined” (p. 26). They are interested in naming and revealing the range of practice possible within different philosophical frameworks, one of which is transformative community art. The modalities are not prescriptive. Adams and Goldbard call them a ‘matrix of possibilities’.
In the case of Lowe however, she begins to develop a model for transformational community-based art programs by identifying *essential* elements and ‘qualities’ for an effective practice. Lowe’s construction includes the development of a ‘ritual framework’ that includes: developing a ‘common positive mood’ (safe, fun, nonthreatening), ‘coming together’ through social interaction that includes a creative process and a community building process, and ‘shared goals’ for both creating art and community building. Lowe also identifies the complex and varied role that the professional artist plays in the process, as a necessary condition for transformation in community art projects (2001).

In her work Lowe is developing a normative model. She is constructing one way of undertaking community art and presenting it as *the* way. Faced with the overwhelming quantity of community art projects and the multiplicity of practice, terms, systems, and methods, I understand this desire to form a structure. My first work along this path was also an attempt to develop a concrete model, to lay a solid framework for what I had found to be effective practices as a way to ‘get ground under my feet’ and to create a solid place from which work. But now I am leery of The Model, in singular form. This anonymous quote\(^{34}\) from Adams and Goldbard’s report resonated strongly with me; “we should be looking at models with a small ‘m,’ so people can pick and choose and be aware of the values underpinning each one. There are constitutive elements people can extract from models.” (p. 40). This person goes on to express discomfort with the idea of models with a capital ‘M’ that some are eager to replicate. Replication without regard for the fact that ‘The Model’ was developed in a specific context and set of circumstances is highly problematic. While ‘The Model’ may have been wildly successful within a specific environment it does not mean that it will be successful or even appropriate in a

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\(^{34}\) Adams and Goldbard based their review of the field on interviews with 52 community artists, community art consultants, theoreticians, and staff involved in community cultural development. Throughout their report they included anonymous quotes from these interviews.
different community, environment, or process. For example, Jumblies Theatre has
developed a very successful model in which the company completes a three year
residency in a neighbourhood. Funders taken with the success of the model have begun
to question the timelines of other groups working in communities; if it takes Jumblies 3
years, how can you complete this process in 2? Or if it only takes Jumblies 3 years, why
do you need 5? This places community art projects in the uncomfortable position of
having to define themselves against Jumblies rather than in terms of their own work and
processes.

While it can be seductive to develop a formal model, it can also become limiting
and restrict not only the range of practice, but the range of the possible, as well as the
way we label and view our work. For example, Lowe identifies a safe, fun, and
nonthreatening environment as an essential element for an effective transformative
community-based art practice. And while I agree that this is an ideal that many
community art projects strive for; does this mean there cannot be an effective
transformational practice in an environment of conflict, discord, and disagreement? I
would argue that the places where the most profound transformational changes are
occurring are dangerous, threatening, and fraught with conflict. If the environment in a
T.C.A. group is uncomfortable and conflictual does this mean that it ‘fails’? That it is not
an effective T.C.A. project? Forming relationships across difference is often a goal of
transformative community art. Social relations are embedded in issues of power. To
transform them we are trying to change the social fabric and hence confronting deeply
held belief structures and a culture of oppression, othering, and prejudice. I would not
describe a space where this kind of change is being built as ‘safe’. This issue of conflict
and dangerous spaces versus idealized ‘safe spaces’ within T.C.A is just one example of
how a model can be limiting and problematic in a field of practice as broad as T.C.A. A safe and nonthreatening environment may be very possible to achieve when community participants are united by a common goal, for example, of confronting a corporation or government responsible for the contamination of their neighbourhood, however it is less likely in a project whose goal is to effect transformational change within a community divided.

An Examination of the Substantive Components of T.C.A.

In this section I briefly outline the importance of the terms ‘transformation’, ‘community’, and ‘art’ as they relate to our field of practice in order to further explicate the concept of Transformative Community Art.

Transformation

The addition of the modifier ‘transformative’ to the term ‘community art’, anchors community art within its stated purpose of transformation. Transformation is the state of being changed in form, appearance, structure, condition, nature, or character. A transformation is a significant or thorough change, rather than a decorative alteration or superficial change. The purpose of transformative community art is to transform something; art, identity, social relations, social reality, institutions, culture, belief structures, public space, etc. What is being transformed varies from project to project, but the goal of all transformative community art projects should be identified as some form of progressive transformation. T.C.A. is grounded in a progressive value framework and as such, the desired transformation should advance social justice goals. This transformative goal then drives the artistic and community processes. The design and

35 The issue of a ‘safe space’ is pervasive in the community art literature, and in my opinion quite problematic. An in-depth examination of the issue is outside the scope of this paper, however an examination of the discourse around ‘safe spaces’ and an analysis of this theme through the application of T.C.A. would be a rich site for future work. In my own work I refer to a ‘supportive space’.
implementation of any given project should move consciously towards the desired transformation. This focus on transformation provides the shape and structure for the project and will outline the degree to which time and effort is spent on any given process or product. The necessary elements of any T.C.A. project are those that move it toward its transformational goal. This re-articulation of community art that emphasizes the role of transformation allows for a multiplicity of practice and a range of frameworks while still honouring both ‘community’ and ‘art’ as powerful components.

Community

Community can play multiple roles in T.C.A. It can be the location where the art is created, the co-creators or participants in art-making, the audience that the art is created or enacted for, the material from which it is created, the theme of the work, the site that is impacted, or any combination of these roles (Lacy, 1995; Marché 1998; Resonance Creative Consulting Partners, 2008). T.C.A. does not require a particular definition of community, but it does require a critical analysis of community. How community is being defined and mobilized should be made explicit. The role that community plays in T.C.A. and the intensity of that role should be determined largely by the transformational goal of the project although, of course resources both human and

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36 The roles that community members can assume as collaborators or participants, is an area that requires further explication and examination. Collaboration and participation are often used indiscriminately and interchangeably within the community art literature without clear exposition about the nature of the collaboration or participation involved. Community art projects are often portrayed as idyllic spaces of collaboration, participation, and inclusion; the meaning and limits of these concepts are rarely explored. What is participation? Is it being involved in the art-making process? Is it having a say in the projects undertaken? The themes explored? Does collaboration mean there is shared leadership? Or does it mean that everyone has a space to express their opinions? Where does power lie? Who holds it at different times? Which processes are collaborative and which are directive? Who is included and who is excluded? How and when is this decided? What are the criteria for participation or collaboration? Transformative Community Art needs to ask these questions. It cannot remain in the realm of ‘feel good’ concepts. T.C.A. is a messy and complex process; and while it may sometimes strive to be participatory, and there may be spaces of collaboration and moments of inclusivity – there are also times when it is directive, individual and exclusive.
material, time, infrastructure, artistic goals, and the specific characteristics of the community will also have an impact on the design of the strategy.

As a term, ‘community’ like ‘community art’, is quickly losing meaning through indiscriminate overuse. In the community art discourse, ‘community’ is often invoked in a way that promotes a homogeneous construction of community that conceals complexity, diversity, and conflicts. Communities, like public spaces, are defined by exclusions; who’s in and who’s out. The multiplicity of communities, the characteristics, contexts, and identities that bind people together, and the functions that community serves are rarely explored. These useages of ‘community’ within community art are particularly troubling as community art often engages marginalized communities, communities that are identified in some way as being different from the dominant norm (Ford-Smith, 2001; Kester, 1995). To work with these communities in a process for transformational change while simultaneously constructing them as monolithic “one-dimensional pre-constituted things” (Ford-Smith) is extremely problematic.

T.C.A. needs to consider hybrid communities that take into account internal differences, disagreements, and multiple identities. ‘Building’ community is often mentioned as one of the goals of community art. This can be a useful construction (rather than insipid, vague ‘feel-good’ jargon) if we utilize it to signify that community is never static or complete and is always in the process of becoming (Deutsche, 1996; Ford-Smith, 2001; Raven; 1995). Constructing community in this way will keep us from approaching community as a reified object and will open-up space for diverse and critical perspectives from within communities. This form of scrutiny demonstrates the rigorous questioning of terminology and the precision of language that T.C.A. requires. T.C.A.

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needs to consider the community that is constantly made new, the community that is forming around and through the art-making and its connection to larger communities outside of the process.

_Art_  

Art, that which is created and the medium through which the transformation is enacted, is central to Transformative Community Art. In T.C.A. the art is important. Attention to form, aesthetics, and producing a final artistic product are key to the process.\(^{38}\) The art should not be an additive to make the ‘serious business’ of education, engagement, or development more palatable (Baca, 1995; Borges, 2004; Salverson, 2004; Ford-Smith, 2001). There is a reason that art is being developed, created, displayed, or performed outside of a traditional art institution and there is a reason that the powerful form and concept of ‘art’ is being mobilized. Art is the imaginative and illustrative language through which transformation takes place. Art opens up the possibility of change through the imagination and the ability to envision things as different. It is a powerful medium through which to move, communicate, inspire, disturb, disrupt, and trouble.

Community art has had a complex relationship with ‘art’ since its inception, constantly engaging with the question ‘but is it art?’ Like many artistic movements before it, transformative community art seeks to transform the category of ‘art’ itself. Art is much more than “the creation of works of beauty” (Larousse American Pocket Dictionary, 2001, p. 52). Who has the power to define a work as ‘art’? Who gets to create

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\(^{38}\) I find it perplexing that so many people writing about the practice of community art have said that the ‘art’ is not important. That rather the important part of the practice is the process, the activity of getting people together to relate to each other, to work together, to explore issues, etc. I wonder why then, they are interested in community _art_. If the art is not important, why not employ transformation through another means? Why not employ community development, non-formal education, community organizing, popular education etc.? Art has been understood as ‘inherently transformational’. Why I wonder, invoke and mobilize the incredible power of art to then negate it? To me this demonstrates that the underlying concern of art as an ‘elitist’ practice is still functioning despite our field’s belief in the democratization of art.
it? Who defines beauty? What is the purpose of these ‘works of beauty’? Why are they
created? For whom? As these questions reveal, art is a contested term deeply implicated
in relations of power: the power to name, the power to express and the power to make
visible.

Art has always been nominalist (Mitchell, 2005). T.C.A.’s transformation of the
category of art is part of a long tradition of struggle over the ‘honourific’ of art. T.C.A.
transforms the category of art through innovations in form and aesthetics as art-making
and presentation/display/installation move from studio and art establishment
environments to community environments. T.C.A. transforms art through shifts in what
materials can be used to create art, what ‘products’ can be seen as art, and through
repositioning the function of art in society.

While some conceptualizations of community art are based on a belief in the
inherent transformative power of art in general, not all community art projects have
respected the power of art through attention to form and aesthetics (i.e., art as a tool for
social change). Not all art processes carried out in community locations are
transformative (i.e., art education in the community and art for the community) and not
all projects called community art have been developed, implemented, or evaluated with a
transformative perspective (i.e., art as social work).

Developing an artistic product for public display outside of the group of co-
creators and participants creating it should be the intention of all T.C.A. projects. The
final artistic product is important as a representation of the social and artistic processes
that created it, and its public display deepens the impact by disseminating the work to a
wider community. The public display or presentation of the artistic work demonstrates

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39 Can people be materials for art? Can institutions, socio-political relationships, or civic society be
materials for art-making? Can the relationships produced through community art be the art?
the change that occurred, hints at the change that is possible, and carries the conversation forward. In this way the dialogue continues with those not directly involved in the transformative community art project. What will the community do with this glimpse of a possible future?

That being said, there may be instances where it is not possible or desirable to complete or display a final product. Perhaps the project was too ambitious for the available time and resources, perhaps it was too personal and the co-creators felt vulnerable presenting it publicly. The inability to produce or display a final product however does not mean the project undertaken does not fit into the T.C.A. model or that it ‘fails’. As was mentioned in the transformation section, in T.C.A. the transformation may not be achieved, but the goal of transformation should guide the project. In the case of art, the intent to produce a final product and to present it should be a goal that is integral to the design and implementation of the project, but not doing so does not negate the project from being located within the category of T.C.A.

*What Makes Transformative Community Art Distinct from Other Practices?*

Not all work developed under the banner of community art has been transformative. I have argued, however that many of those non-transformative projects developed under the rubric of community art most likely fit into other existing categories; community development, community education, community art education, popular education, etc. And while Transformative Community Art is a broad and flexible category, not all projects that have been called community art would fit within it.

In the West there has been a conflation between popular education and community art. Is community art just popular education repacked with a more accessible name for Western audiences? What makes transformative community art a distinct form
of practice from popular education, community development, community engagement, etc.? The true mobilization of the powerful force of art is an important point of demarcation. When the art becomes important in a transformative process, when there is attention to aesthetics, form, and technique, when art becomes respected and not used as a ‘warm-up’, ‘ice-breaker’ or ‘motivator’ before or between ‘the serious work’, when art-making is one of the points of arrival rather than a ‘vehicle’ to take people elsewhere such as toward a personal development goal, and when art is more than an enticement to ‘trick’ people into or reward them for participating in a project, then the project may fit within the category of T.C.A. When art becomes more than a functionalist tool it becomes possible to enter into a Transformative Community Art, rather than a popular education process.

Is transformative community art just popular education with a greater interest in aesthetics then? No, T.C.A. opens up a breadth of practice with varying levels of collaboration and participation. The community is not always engaged in a popular education consciousness-raising methodology, although elements of this model can be incorporated. A T.C.A. project can be focused on creating a transformative art product with the input and support from the community, but without engaging community members in an intensive social process. For example, an artist may interview factory workers and tour the factory to gain information on unsafe or exploitive work practices. The artist could then use this information to create a dance to communicate these issues in public spaces in an effort to gain support from people not directly related to the factory. The dance could be used to mobilize the public into petitioning the government for improved labour standards, or into boycotting the company until it improves working conditions. In this example, the goal is transformative. It is to engage citizens in an issue
that does not directly affect them for the greater good of their fellow citizens (to enact positive changes in work conditions). The community is present in the factory workers that were consulted and are represented, the audience who are the fellow citizens, and in the spatial locations for the public performance. Art is created and performed in the form of a dance developed by a professional artist. Incorporating all of these elements, the project is incorporated easily within the category of T.C.A. even without a direct intensive social process being undertaken with either the factory workers or the wider community. T.C.A. allows for a wider breadth of artistic and social practices than popular education, while still maintaining characteristics to identify the category as distinct from other practices.

What then separates Transformative Community Art from community-based art education or public art where the art is central and aesthetics, form, and technique are all valued? In a word, intention; specifically the intention of transformation. While community-based art education may be focused on personal development (gaining artistic skills) and public art may be focused on creating a well crafted art object to enhance public space, T.C.A. has a transformational agenda that drives its artistic and social processes. In the case where community members who do not identify themselves as artists are creators or co-creators of the artistic product, acquiring artistic skills and enhancing technique are important processes to undertake in order to execute a ‘successful’ 40 final product, but skill enhancement alone is not the goal.

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40 Some issues around ‘success’ and ‘failure’ will be addressed in Chapter 4, however constructions of success and failure are important themes in the community art discourse that warrant a closer examination than can be provided in this paper.
Summary

In summary Transformative Community Art incorporates elements of the functionalist and ‘art for its own sake’ philosophies and moves beyond them to incorporate a transformative goal. T.C.A. is a broad concept that allows for a wide breadth of practice within the framework. It is a concept that allows the field of practice to be identifiable without being reified. A Transformative Community Art approach can be identified by its goal of progressive transformation that drives the process, its critical approach to the important element of community as complex, multidimensional, and dynamic, by its respect for art-making, and by the goal of producing an artistic product for public display. Transformative Community Art is not a model; it can not be standardized. Rather it is somewhat messy, and disordered, and should allow space for experimentation, failure, and for the unexpected to occur.

Re-visioning the category of community art as Transformative Community Art accomplishes the following; it provides a terminology to identify the current field of practice and differentiate it from past practices labeled as community art that may have stayed firmly on one or the other side of the binaries, it re-articulates community art by identifying the raison d’être and main distinguishing feature of the field, transformation, and it makes visible the main conceptual bodies of meaning and beliefs that engender the field, providing a rich area of inquiry from which to develop a more nuanced discourse. The next chapter provides an example of a transformative community art project in order to further illustrate the concept.
Chapter Four: An Example of Transformative Community Art

The Context

The first mural completed by the Advanced Visual Arts Group in the Costa Rican component of the regional Lo Creo community art project provides a good example of a transformative community art practice. The mural was painted on a wall in the neighbourhood of Sagrada Familia, often simply called ‘Sagrada’, where Vecinos was located. Sagrada Familia is a marginalized community in the southern part of San José, Costa Rica facing numerous challenges such as economic disadvantage, social segregation, xenophobia, overpopulation, environmental contamination, school abandonment, high unemployment, child and youth prostitution, drug trafficking and consumption, robbery, street work for children and youth, and domestic violence.

In 1994, a wall was built to physically segregate impoverished Sagrada from an expensive new housing development built across a vacant lot. The wall also separated Sagrada from the neighbourhood 15 de Septiembre with which it has numerous important educational, familial, and institutional ties. The wall cut off a well-used community foot path between the neighbourhoods that children and youth used to get to school, parents crossed to get to work, family and friends used to visit each other, etc. The wall forced community members to take circuitous bus routes or walk long distances in order to get from one neighbourhood to the other spending valuable time and resources. After 2 years of petitioning the municipal government to remove the wall, the community was successful in having two small openings cut in the wall to allow people to pass through.

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41 It is estimated that 40% of the population of Sagrada Familia are Nicaraguan immigrants to Costa Rica. 42 The challenges facing Sagrada Familia are summarized from, Annex 5 / Country project Documents / Costa Rica attached to Regional Programme Document Culture - locality and creativity. Unpublished document. (2002).
Unfortunately this action created an unsafe situation for residents as it was not possible to see who was on the other side of the wall before you passed through and the site became a popular place for robberies. The wall also became a prominent place for illegal dumping, a major problem in Sagrada, that increased the environmental contamination of the neighbourhood.

The community was adamant that they did not want a mural painted on the wall to beautify it. The wall is a physical manifestation of the ugliness of social exclusion and their goal is to remove it entirely. Taking into account the community’s position in relation to the wall, the Advanced Visual Arts Group negotiated with the Red, a community network of leaders, to paint a mural on the wall that would communicate the community’s dream of destroying it.

**The Mural**

The completed mural depicts a wide range of community members from the neighbourhood including school children, senior citizens, drug addicts, alcoholics, youth playing soccer, sex trade workers, and the Chinese-Costa Rican families that run the local restaurant and grocery store. The local police are represented as they are experienced by the community, as a constant presence of surveillance and threat that turns a blind eye to rampant criminal activity. Present too are the politicians who arrive every four years to buy people’s votes and then disappear until the next election. While respectfully representing community members, the mural also depicts some of the community’s challenges in terms of substance abuse and childhood prostitution and exploitation. The figures are seen from the back. The community is facing the wall and looking beyond it and through it, toward the vision of its destruction. Large hands painted in an iconic Latin American style lift sections of wall up from the ground, push
parts of it down from the top, and break holes in it. Blue skies are visible through the ‘holes’. Some of the figures painted on the wall peer through the holes, crawl through the gaps, or sit on top of the wall. The only text on the mural is the word ‘equality’. In this way the mural enacts the community’s dream of destroying the very wall it is painted on.

The mural did not cover up the wall; instead it re-inscribed it with the community’s desire. The finished product draws attention to the wall and exposes it as a manifestation of social exclusion at the same time that it represents the community’s desire for equality and the removal of barriers. The goal of the mural is ultimately its own destruction, it is meant to exist as an intervention in the socio-cultural reality of the neighbourhood for a specific purpose. When that purpose is served, it is to be destroyed and hence the barrier between neighbourhoods removed.

The mural has been readily accepted by the community and is most ardently protected by its most marginalized members such as transvestites and the homeless who see themselves artfully and respectfully represented and included in the mural as members of the community. The mural represents the diversity of the community, draws attention to some of its challenges, and clearly communicates the community’s dream for the future. For these reasons it has been accepted by the community who are proud of the mural and have respected and protected it. When I last visited the mural a year and a half after it was painted, it had yet to be graffitied.43

The Analysis: Why this Mural and the Group that created it are an Example of T.C.A

To examine the ways in which the Advanced Visual Arts Group functioned as a Transformative Community Art project in its creation of the community mural in

43 While the community respects and protects the mural while the wall remains, it has yet to be seen how the community will react to the destruction of the mural that has come to mean so much to them if they are one day successful in removing the wall.
Sagrada Familia, I will use ‘transformation’ ‘community’ and ‘art’ as generative terms to examine the project’s intentions, processes, and final product.

Transformation

The Advanced Visual Arts Group and its work were transformative in a number of ways. The group’s mural project was based in the transformative goal of social justice. In supporting the community’s efforts to break down the wall they were attempting to transform their physical reality, the daily life of their community, and the institutionalized socio-economic and cultural beliefs that justify social exclusion at the political level. Removing the wall would reunite the neighbourhoods of Sagrada Familia and 15 de Septiembre and change the daily lives of all community members who needed to move from one neighbourhood to the other, making the journey cheaper and faster. It would also positively impact the community by removing an obstacle that proved a beneficial asset for those looking to commit the crimes of robbery, assault, and illegal dumping, making the area safer and cleaner. Removing the wall would change and challenge the social relations between the residents of the marginalized neighbourhood of Sagrada Familia, with its high population of homeless, impoverished, and illegal immigrant residents, and the neighbouring upper middle class housing development beside it. Removing the wall would mean the municipality of San José would have to admit (implicitly if not explicitly) that the wall was a violation of human rights. That it was a technique of social exclusion employed to segregate an economically, culturally, socially, and politically marginalized population and unacceptable in a democracy that espouses the values of social justice and equality.\(^{44}\)

\(^{44}\) Constitution of Costa Rica Title 4 Article 33: “All persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination against human dignity.”
The final artistic product, the mural, represents the dream of transformation. It is the vision of a possible utopia (removing the wall) that contributes to creating the equitable society that is possible. The mural draws attention to the problem of the wall and communicates the solution, thus re-inscribing its meaning from exclusion and isolation to inclusion and connection. The final artistic product thus transforms the meaning of the wall (to an expression of community desire and action). It represents the altered reality in the moment when the desired transformation occurs (community members passing through the broken wall toward a future of connection and equality), and exists for the purpose of helping the transformation to occur.

On an immediate level, the social relations in the community were transformed by the process undertaken by the Advanced Visual Arts Group. Community members saw the youth of their community engaged in positive and constructive action for the benefit of their community. This allowed them to see young people differently (rather than as kids hanging out on the street corner up to no good, etc.) and provided them with an opportunity to get to know their youth. Community members stopped to ask the youth about their work and to discuss the mural. The youth also met the leaders of the community network and vice versa, building new relationships across generations in their efforts to realize the project.

The most challenging change in social relations to achieve was in the Advanced Visual Arts Group itself, where the goal of breaking down barriers was mirrored in the social processes of the group. The project facilitators attempted to break down the barriers between youth from different Southern Neighbourhoods, from different turfs within neighbourhoods, and between the Nicaraguan immigrant and Costa Rican national youth populations. While Vecinos was located in Sagrada Familia, it worked for the
benefit of the ‘Southern Neighbourhoods’, a group of communities in the south of San José that share the realities and challenges of social, economic, and cultural exclusion and marginalization. Collectively as a group of neighbourhoods, they face the same negative stereotypes and discrimination from the rest of the capital. And yet I was surprised to find that while community members in each neighbourhood recognize that an unfair stereotype is operating against them, they believe the wholly negative stereotypes about their neighbouring communities. So while parents from the neighbourhood Cristo Rey were reluctant to send their children to programs in Sagrada Familia because it was ‘too dangerous’, parents in Sagrada Familia were equally reluctant to send their children to Cristo Rey for the same reason.

The Culture - Locality and Creativity project was Vecinos’ first project which drew large numbers of children and youth from outside of Sagrada Familia, or from the immigrant population within Sagrada into the physical location of Vecinos. Previous work with these populations had been carried out in their home communities. Costa Rican youth from Sagrada, especially youth from the ‘Bajo de la Puñalada’, viewed Vecinos as a second home. Their older brothers and sisters and in some cases even their parents had grown up in Vecinos and so these youth had been coming to Vecinos since they were very small children accompanying their family members. When youth from both the large Nicaraguan immigrant population and from other Southern Neighbourhoods were consciously and consistently included in Vecinos programming, the youth from the Bajo felt threatened and sought to defend their space. This situation exacerbated the already strained relationships between different groups, turfs, and neighbourhoods.
Bringing youth from these different groups together within the same workshop resulted in some interesting social dynamics within the Advanced Visual Arts Group. While there were usually divisions among the youth from different areas of Sagrada (those from ‘Reina de los Angeles’ generally did not get on well with those from the ‘Bajo’, those from largely immigrant Nicaraguan ‘Gracias a Dios’, usually remained separate from the rest of Sagrada). In light of the threat of ‘outsiders’, Sagrada youth united. The dynamic within the group became ‘Sagrada against everyone else’. The two groups were distinctive and easily identifiable according to their cultural interests as reflected in their dress and music; youth from Sagrada were into Hip Hop and Reggaeton and the youth from outside of Sagrada were mainly influenced by punk and rock.

The facilitators implemented a social process to break down the boundaries between the groups and to build relationships among them. One simple yet effective example of their approach can be seen in how music was employed in the workshop. In order to create a positive and creative work environment, music was played while the youth were working on their designs and drawings for the mural. Over the course of each in-centre session, three CDs would be played; one CD was chosen by the facilitators in order to introduce the youth to a range of music, and the other two CDs were chosen by the youth by consensus. This meant that the youth from Sagrada would support the punk or rock choice of the youth from the other Southern Neighbourhoods, in order to in turn, have their reggaeton or hip hop selection supported. In this way the two groups had to cooperate with each other in order to hear the music they preferred. They were also introduced to new music by the facilitators and exposed to the cultural interests of their co-group members as well, broadening their cultural experience and their understanding of the ‘other’ youth. Through a consistent and ongoing approach undertaken by the
group’s facilitators, the two groups of youth began to intermingle more and were able to work together to complete the mural.

In this way, coming together in a common interest (visual art) to achieve an artistic goal (paint a community mural) provided the context to transform the social relations of youth from the Southern Neighbourhoods. I do not wish to imply that the context alone was sufficient to achieve this change, or that the relationships were completely idyllic. The facilitators, one of whom has a Masters degree in Sociology, worked hard to bring the youth together. At times friction between the youth would erupt after a period of relative calm. However conflict was dealt with as it presented itself and work was able to continue. Having the youth work together to complete a project did bring them into proximity with each other and gave them a chance to get to know each other and form relationships. In this manner, the project transformed social relations among the youth of several different turfs and neighbourhoods in southern San José.

Transformation operated on several levels in the community mural project of the Advanced Visual Arts Group. It was the goal of the project, it was represented in the final artistic product, and it occurred in the social processes both within the group and within the community.

*Community*

Community played multiple roles in this project; community was the theme of the work, the location where the work was developed, and the site of impact of the work. The youth in the Advanced Visual Arts Group learned about the community of Sagrada Familia. They examined the local history of the community and the wall and its impact on the community (as not all of the youth in the group were from Sagrada Familia, many of them had no direct experience with or knowledge of the wall). They interviewed
community members and met with local organizations and institutions. The youth also negotiated with the community in order to paint the mural. Past proposals to paint the wall had been rejected as the community’s goal was to destroy it, not beautify it. They reflected on the make-up of Sagrada; exploring who was in the community and how best to represent the diversity and range of community members. They deeply considered what the mural would mean to the community and what they intended it to mean. They also examined the issues of human rights and social exclusion, a process that led to the decision to include the word ‘equality’ as the lone piece of text in the mural.

As was mentioned previously new relationships were built in the community. Different community institutions supported the project. The firefighters helped clean the wall and the Community Network provided refreshments for the youth while they worked. The youth were engaged in a conversation with their community both in directly talking to community members passing by while they were working and in the message that the completed mural continues to communicate to the community and to those visiting or passing through it. The mural affirms who is in the community, explicates some challenges faced by the community, and communicates the community’s dream for social transformation - for equality.

Aside from the transformed social relations in the community, the work of developing and creating the mural also transformed space in the community in a very real and unexpected way. While the youth were working, the wall became a community hangout with people stopping by to chat, visit, lend a hand, and ask questions about the work. Music was played while the group was working creating a welcoming and fun environment. The youth explained their work to passerby and interacted with their
community. While the mural was being created this previously ugly, dangerous, and contaminated place became a vibrant if fugacious community hub.

Thus the mural and work of the Advanced Visual Arts Group took up community in many ways. The process developed relationships in the community and transformed (if only ephemerally) the use of space in the community. The mural represents the community, communicates the desires of the community, and is a piece of semi-permanent art in the community that is a source of pride for community members.

Art

In the process of creating the community mural, art was respected. Attention was paid to skill, design, and technique. The Advanced Visual Arts Group underwent a thorough artistic process in order to prepare for the project. As this was the first mural painted by the group they had to learn new artistic skills and techniques in order to complete it. They learned about technical details like how to prepare the wall for painting and what kind of paint to use, as well as elements of design in order to communicate the message. The group reviewed an array of street art, from murals in Venezuela to graffiti in New York, and met a local muralist who shared his work processes as well as technical details of muralism. The youth experimented with elements of design in large scale wall art by designing and painting panels on an internal wall in Vecinos. They also spent numerous classes drawing the human figure in different poses as figures make up most of the mural. The final artistic product is based in the cultural legacy of Latin America. Muralism has a strong tradition in the region, and the particular style of the giant hands employed is iconic.

While the youth learned new artistic skills in order to complete the mural, they also had to work within their skill set in order to achieve an effective product. This meant
considering the skill level of the group when developing the design of the mural. Painting the figures with their backs to the community, looking off into the distance beyond the wall, or passing through the openings in the wall created by the hands, was an effective means of communicating the community’s desire. This design decision also worked within the youth’s skill set. They dealt with the form of the body, but did not have to take on the challenge of painting faces.45

The final artistic product is a testament of the changed social relations in the community and among the youth who were able to work together to create it. In order to communicate the community’s desire clearly, the mural needed to be well designed and well executed and have a clear artistic concept. They were able to achieve these goals. The intended audience understands the message and respects the mural. The mural represents both the problem and the desired solution that would transform the social reality of the community. The art of the form and the technique were respected while creating a product with a clear and hopeful message for change.

Discussion: Constructions of Success and Failure

The Community Mural project of the Advanced Visual Arts Group is just one of countless possible forms that a transformative community art project could take. I have employed it with the intention of illustrating the concept of Transformative Community Art, but it is in no way meant to be prescriptive. The form that this process and product took grew out of the social, cultural, and physical reality of the community in which it was located.

45 The Advanced Visual Arts Group continued to develop their artistic skills. Their second mural painted in downtown San José demonstrates their increased command over design elements and technique and includes several figures either facing forward or in profile.
‘Transformation’, ‘community’, and ‘art’ were all taken into account in the project’s conceptualization, goals, and implementation. The community was engaged as creators of the mural, as supporters of the project, as the theme of the project, and as the location where the work was developed, displayed, and sought to make an impact. The mural was developed with respect for artistic form and technique and the process resulted in a piece of public art that was effective in communicating its message to its intended audience. But what of transformation? While there were changes in social relations among the youth participants and between the youth and the community, and while the mural transformed the physical location and the meaning of the wall, the ultimate transformative goal of the mural has not been achieved. The wall still stands. This does not mean that the process or the product were not effective, and hence do not fit within the concept of T.C.A. This project confronted a significant social ill, social exclusion. To rectify the problem of the wall, the bureaucracy of the municipality which approved the building of the wall must be confronted and convinced to remove it and the owners of the houses in the housing development ‘protected’ by the wall must be approached and made allies. These actions could not be resolved by the painting of the mural alone. Hopefully the mural will be useful to the community in continuing its organizing and lobbying efforts to have the wall removed. If they are not ultimately successful that does not diminish the work undertaken by the Advanced Visual Arts Group or make it non-transformative. The project supports the transformative goal of social justice through the wall’s destruction; that alone, even without the positive transformative social impacts experienced in this project, would have been enough to locate it within the category of T.C.A.
This project can be viewed as ‘successful’ in that significant social and artistic processes were undertaken that resulted in visible change. These processes were supported by the community and resulted in an effective final product that was presented publicly. Its intended audience understood, appreciated, and respected the artistic product and it has achieved some transformative results (although some of them were fugacious). However, this does not mean that transformative community art projects always have to be ‘successful’ in order to be effective. What if the youth from Sagrada Familia had abandoned the project in protest over their ‘turf’ being invaded? What if the community had not understood the message that the mural was trying to communicate? What if the community was divided about the issue of the wall and conflict arose from those who wanted to maintain it and those who wanted to remove it? In all of these cases an effective transformative community art practice could have been undertaken. If the youth from the other Southern Neighbourhoods had needed to take over the mural process in light of Sagrada youth leaving, cross-generational and cross-community relationships could still have been built between the community network and the youth. The community would still have had an opportunity to see youth differently and to revise their stereotypes of the residents of the other Southern Neighbourhoods. An interesting dialogue around solidarity could have developed; perhaps once the youth from, for example, Cristo Rey had completed the mural in support an important issue in Sagrada Familia, the community leaders from Sagrada could have in turn been approached by the youth from Cristo Rey to support an important issue in their neighbourhood, like creating an effective community network like Sagrada’s.

So even if the youth from Sagrada Familia had excluded themselves, although this would have been a painful and difficult situation for the facilitators of the Advanced
Visual Arts Group and for Vecinos as an organization, it would not have eliminated the possibility of a transformational community art practice. In fact, if the project leaders and facilitators were flexible, it could have opened up new areas for transformation such as developing cross-community projects. Taking up my other two examples; if the community did not understand or like the mural, or if there was discord around the message, community meetings could be held in order to explain the youth’s perspective and aesthetic choices, or to exchange views on the issue of the wall within the community. In either case, bringing more community members into dialogue would be a significant social change within the neighbourhood that might have resulted in numerous impacts; more youth might have joined the visual arts group, adults might have requested visual art classes after hearing about the youths’ experiences, more community members might have joined the community network or become politically involved in the issue of the wall, or perhaps the dialogue itself might have been the only noticeable change. Either way, an important social transformation would have occurred in opening up the space and possibility for dialogue.
Chapter Five: Challenges and Threats to Transformative Community Art

As an emerging field of practice that developed out of grass roots activism and radical anti-establishment art practices, community art is constituted within a critical stance towards institutions both public and private. However, more recently community art has been gaining positive attention from a wide range of interests: universities, governments, funding agencies, etc. What does the embracing of community art by the very institutions it developed in opposition to mean for its transformative practice?

Community art confronts a paradox. After decades of work as a marginalized art form and struggling to legitimize our work, we have caught the eye of governments looking to address pressing social concerns in creative ways. As well, governments investing in the idea of ‘the creative city’ have begun to tie art funding to evidence of art’s economic and social impact. Universities are also interested in studying the impact of our work and developing community art degree and diploma programs. Private foundations seeking to underwrite social change have turned to community art and social service institutions see community art as a new way to engage marginalized populations. After years of struggling as outsiders, we have been invited inside, but at what cost? What are the benefits? What does it mean when those who challenged the system become part of the system? How can we maintain a critical and transformative practice in light of these changes? The transformative nature of community art is under threat from three closely related issues; funding, co-optation, and institutionalisation.

Funding: Will the Revolution be Funded?

Public funding of political art work is a hot button issue in Canada right now. SummerWorks, Toronto’s popular independent theatre and art festival which is an
important vehicle for new Canadian work (it is the largest juried festival in the country) has just had its federal funding cut. Last year SummerWorks presented the play *Homegrown* about a playwright’s relationship with a convicted terrorist. This year SummerWorks lost its funding from Heritage Canada which constituted twenty percent of its operating budget. Hearing about the play, a spokesperson for Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, “We are extremely disappointed that public money is being used to fund plays that glorify terrorism” (Nestruck, 2011). According to its playwright and the festival, the play did not glorify terrorism. The Prime Minister did not see the play although he was invited to do so by the festival. After 5 years of continual funding, there has been no statement from Heritage Canada directly linking the funding cut to the presentation of *Homegrown*. Still a public debate around government funding for the arts, the role of the arts in society, and free speech has erupted.

This debate is especially fierce in Toronto, where SummerWorks is located and where Toronto City Council is updating its anti-discrimination policy with the aim of restricting public funding of political events. Right-wing councillors like Giorgio Mamoliti, who has stated that “public dollars absolutely shouldn’t be spent on politically-charged art work”, are lining up against the arts community. Executive Director of the Toronto Arts Council, Claire Hopkins stated, “To try to say that art that has a political slant shouldn’t be funded is really against free speech” and Toronto’s Executive Director of Culture Rita Davies, remarked that “Art is political by nature. Almost by definition.” (Doolittle, 2011). And so while the restriction on municipal funds for political work is not aimed specifically at the arts, it will have a disproportionate impact on the arts sector in Toronto.
Community artists have generally relied on municipal, provincial, and federal art councils for funding support. Arts councils are arm’s length public funding bodies that distribute funding through a juried peer review process and subscribe to values such as transparency and confidentiality. The limited availability of operating funding through the arts councils means that community art organizations must patch together funding from a range of funding programs. What are the implications of transformative community artists receiving funding from government bodies like social services, Canadian Heritage, and Toronto’s Community Partnership and Investment Program (CPIP), which are not arm’s length to the government? How will reliance on granting programs which can easily be used to advance the agenda of the state impact the community art field?

Private foundations are also increasingly playing a role in funding community art. What are the implications for the field of relying increasingly on private foundational funding when foundations are accountable to no one except their boards and government laws regulating charities? (Pacific, 2001) Private foundations are self-defined and free to pursue their own aims without responding to expressed needs and desires from the field (Adams & Goldbard, 2001). How then can we continue to pursue our own needs rather than succumbing to the agenda that is funded? Through the provision and regulation of funds, foundations can easily co-opt social movements by supporting organizations with less radical agendas and therefore protect capital and maintain the status quo, suppress critical organizations, and control movements from within while appearing to do good for social change (Rose, 2009). As a radical practice for social change what are the ramifications for T.C.A. as private philanthropy seeks to subsidize social change and intervene in public policy? (Pacific)
One example that illustrates the complexities and contradictions of private capital ‘partnering’ with community art for social change is the Laidlaw Foundation’s funding of The Garbage Collection. This pilot community art project brought together The Toronto Environmental Alliance, sanitation workers from CUPE Local 416, and visual artists to explore environmental issues related to waste disposal. The project resulted in four murals on environmental themes being painted on garbage trucks. When the murals were unveiled one of them was interpreted by the media as a critique of Toronto’s controversial plan to ship the city’s garbage to Kirkland Lake. One city councillor, who was then chair of the Works Committee, interpreted the mural as an accusation of corruption at City Hall and ordered the mural to be painted over. The Laidlaw Foundation initially supported the muralists and was satisfied with the controversy surrounding the act of censorship as it furthered their goal of fostering cultural democracy. Plans were made to repaint the mural on the side of a building. However, when the repainting coincided with the municipal election in which the Kirkland Lake proposal was a key campaign issue and the aforementioned councillor was running for Mayor, Laidlaw decided not to release the funds for repainting until after the election. This decision made solely by Laidlaw was fiercely opposed by the project participants.

So did the Laidlaw Foundation really want to foster ‘resistance’ and ‘cultural democracy’? Or were they willing to foster cultural democracy up to a (non-controversial) point? How can a foundation be a ‘partner’ when they control the funds and can therefore make unilateral decisions in opposition to the desires of their project ‘partners’? How ‘radical’ can change be when it is underwritten by private foundations?

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46 Project details summarized here are drawn from Barndt 2004; Ford-Smith, 2001; and Pacific, 2001.
who have their own interests to protect? What is the role of private foundations in funding politically critical work? Laidlaw had the opportunity to engage directly in civic life, to resist the city’s act of censorship and to push for greater cultural democracy (to mobilize their funds to back their stated aims) but they stepped back rather than forward in solidarity with their community partners. Instead they perpetrated what The Garbage Collection project interpreted as a second act of censorship by withholding the funding until after the election.

Clearly funding of community art is a complex issue. In the limited space of this thesis it is not possible to thoroughly examine the range of funding issues related to the arts and to radical social change movements. In this segment I will focus my discussion on two main issues: how to maintain a critical edge when community art is funded by government, corporate, or foundation funding and how the current funding system impacts on community art organizations and practices.

**Doing the Work that is Needed vs. Doing the Work that is Funded: Maintaining a Critical Practice in Transformative Community Art**

How can transformative community art maintain its critical edge when it is funded by public and/or private capital? As Adams and Goldbard explain,

> It is in the nature of community cultural development work that criticism of existing institutions and social arrangements will emerge along with visions for change. Because community cultural development work is often financed or sponsored through existing (and imperfect) institutions, practitioners frequently face conflicts between the interests of their funders or sponsors and those of the participants. (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, pp. 65-66)

Adams and Goldbard call this issue “legal contract versus moral contract” and note that in the case of a conflict of interest community artists must align themselves with the

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47 One of the justifications put forward and later withdrawn for delaying the funding was whether or not a foundation could be involved in electoral politics.
community or “moral contract” or “risk that their work will be perceived as a form of manipulation or imposition, leading to deep demoralization for participants” (p. 66). I would argue that not aligning yourself with the community would be the antithesis of the values of the community art field. A community artist who aligned themselves with capital over the interests and needs of project participants would not just “risk that their work will be perceived as a form of manipulation or imposition” such work would indeed be a form of manipulation and social control functioning in the interests of the state and/or capital, depending on the source of funding. It can be an uncomfortable position to on the one hand be developing work that is critical of government policy and on the other hand be dependent on government funding. I often express this irony as ‘smash the state - where’s our cheque?’

I do think that it is imperative that public money finance transformative community art as a public good. I also think that private capital support through foundations is an important support for developing innovative transformative community art projects focused on social change. It is important however to be aware of the conflicting agendas, power structures, and complex moral issues that operating within this funding framework implies. Being aware of these issues is the first step towards maintaining our critical practice. It is important that we take time as independent artists or within our community art organizations to reflect on our practice and whether it is true to our aims, or has become skewed or influenced by funding programs and priorities.

How can we ensure, in light of limited funding opportunities and resources for transformative community art, that we are doing the work that is necessary, urgent, and desired by communities, rather than simply work that is fundable because it promotes the

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48 As T.C.A. is grounded in a progressive value framework, transformative community artists need to align themselves with communities to work for progressive social change.
agendas of the state and capital. For example, part of Clay & Paper Theatre’s mandate is to “work with as wide a cross-section of the population as possible”.

Clay & Paper Theatre works with the community as a whole in mixed populations. We are interested in inclusion and creating opportunities for the entire community to participate together, not in creating silos of participation among seniors, youth, new comers, etc. As a result we are not eligible for a vast amount of social service funding that many community art groups rely on. This funding is dedicated to working with specific ‘at-risk’ or ‘under-served’ populations. We are often tempted to develop programs for youth or seniors for example, in order to access this funding, even though such projects would not be consistent with Clay & Paper Theatre’s methodology. We do work with all of these groups, but together as part of the entire human population around us. It takes a great deal of reflection and conversation within the organization to keep us true to our mission and to not be swayed by the siren call of available funds.

In Ecuador I worked with CECAFEC, El Centro Ecuatoriano de Capacitación y Formación de Educadores de la Calle, an organization that offers training to adults who provide services, protection, or education to ‘at-risk’ children and youth. CECAFEC has a full-time staff position dedicated to maintaining the philosophical and ideological line of the organization. This staff member is the living memory of the organization, and all new initiatives or projects as well as all publications and policy decisions are discussed with and reviewed by him prior to implementation/acceptance. He ensures that the organization acts in accordance with its mandate and values, rather than in response

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50 The Ecuadorian Centre for the Training and Formation of Street Educators. In 1994 CECAFEC expanded its original 1992 mission from a focus on benefiting street children and youth to include work for the benefit of all at-risk children and youth. Note: in Spanish ‘formation’ implies a long-term process of personal and/or social development. It is distinguished from ‘education’ which is often (mis)interpreted as the acquiring of knowledge and from ‘training’ which refers to the acquisition of specific skills.
to outside influences. While this position may seem like a luxury to our under-
resourced, under-staffed organizations, it is an interesting response/solution to the issue
of funding influencing action.

Keeping Funders from Defining the Field

An issue closely related to not letting funding opportunities define the work, is
not letting funders define the field or the ways in which we work together. The problem
of ‘uniqueness’ is an interesting point of reflection in this regard. As Adams and
Goldbard note, “the exigencies of fund-raising encourage organizations to present
themselves as unique” (2001, p. 78). Funders are attracted to supporting new innovative
projects, which does sometimes provide exciting opportunities to try something different.
The lack of sustained funding to do the core of our work and to carry on the processes
that work for us however means that we have to constantly repackgage the work that we
do to make it visible, fundable, new, and ‘unique’. This is a disservice to the field; we
have developed out of the same history, the same roots, and therefore we have similar
approaches and ideas. Why should we be pushed into always inventing something ‘new’
rather than carrying on with what works? When preparing a funding application for a
private foundation I was told by the program officer that I would need to emphasize how
Clay & Paper Theatre is different from Jumblies Theatre, because Jumblies had been
funded for a similar proposal the year before. I complied because I can not afford to
jeopardize any possible funding for Clay & Paper, but in doing so I felt that I was doing a
great disservice to both community-based theatre companies. Ruth Howard, the founding
Artistic Director of Jumblies Theatre was mentored early on in her career by David

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51 CECAFEC found this position to be of great value to the organization. The staff member raised
interesting points for discussion and reflection in regular staff meetings as well as organizational
development activities. It should be noted however that this system is not entirely unproblematic. In some
extreme forms it could become a form of cultural dictatorship.
Anderson, the founding Artistic Director of Clay & Paper Theatre. Many Toronto artists have worked at both Jumblies and Clay & Paper. The two companies, along with Shadowland Theatre and Puppetmongers, are also part of the Toronto puppetry coalition Raucous Caucus, who support each other through sharing ideas, resources, and knowledge. We are a connected and interrelated field. Is there not enough important work to be done that more than one company cannot apply the same approach? David Anderson often remarks, ‘what is puppetry, but theft?’ Clay & Paper encourages our community to steal our good ideas, and we incorporate the good ideas of others into our work when we find them to be helpful. What does it cost us as a field to be trapped by the desires of funding agencies in a relentless cycle of innovation, newness, and uniqueness?

**Keeping Funders from Driving the Dialogue**

There is a current trend among funders to hold conferences and events for their grantees at which we can ‘network’, share our practices, and discuss issues. Indeed the need for support for face-to-face meetings and other infrastructure for networking and sharing to promote and consolidate the field was one of the recommendations to grantmakers made by Adams and Goldbard in their 2001 review of the field. My concern

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52 Clay & Paper Theatre makes resources available for free download on our webpage. Offerings have included scripts from a number of our summer shows, our Puppets without Barriers toolkit, a how-to guide to developing theatre accessible to Deaf, deafened, hearing impaired, low-vision, and blind audience members and plans to make our unique bike trailers, currently being used by the CYCLOPS: Cycling Oriented Puppet Squad.

53 There is some resentment in the field toward this trend. Artists can often be heard lamenting the amount of money spent on such conferences when operating funding for community art is so scarce. Lately it seems like such conferences and other opportunities for sharing and networking are receiving ample funds. Examples of conferences in the Toronto Area include: Vital Links: Enriching Communities through Art and Art through Communities, The Creative City: Block by Block – Creators and Communities, and Art at the Hub: A Symposium on Making Art Locally. The Neighbourhood Arts Network is another new networking initiative for the sector. This Toronto-wide network of artists, arts organizations, cultural workers, and community agencies provides a range of services including: an interactive website with member profiles, a monthly e-newsletter with job postings, blog posts, and events, in-person networking and professional development events, advocacy, sharing resources and research, and creating tools for advocacy and promotion.
is that through these conferences, funders are driving the dialogue. I have attended a number of these conferences since my return to Toronto in 2005, and have found some of the keynote talks, panel discussions, and roundtables interesting. It is my experience however, that the most vital and interesting exchanges take place during the breaks, in informal unstructured dialogues where community artists and community art workers can talk about the issues and ideas that are of interest to them, rather than the issues defined by the funders as important.

To this end I think that it is vital that we develop community artist driven modes of exchange. We need more coalitions and groups like Raucous Caucus, where ideas and information can be exchanged. While it can seem like a burden to add additional volunteer work on top of the copious amounts of unpaid work we generally put into our projects, it is well worth it to ensure that our areas of concern are being addressed and that we are being nourished by the ideas, thoughts, and experiences of our peers.

**Funders and the Manipulation of Language**

Some reflections on language have already been explored in Chapter 2, however it is interesting to reflect on the direct impact that funding has had on language in community art. For example social service language such as ‘target populations’, ‘deliverables’ and ‘indicators’ have infiltrated the field. Reducing community art to statistical information obscures the aims and practice of the field; all considerations of art-making, aesthetics, and artistic products are subsumed to social impacts (Bishop, 2006b).

In order to access funding from a range of sources, community artists have had to learn to express their work in terms of the languages of a number of fields such as education, social services, and community development. Using the language of these
fields can have both positive and negative impacts. We can learn and use these languages in order to jump through funders’ hoops and access funds for us to do our work. But if we are not vigilant, we can also be subtly shifted by the language, it can affect the way that we think about and structure our work. It can begin to lull us with its bland bureaucratic jargon and shift us away from a transformative agenda to an agenda of insipid participation and personal development. It can distract our attention from important moments and processes to focus instead on data collection, counting and categorizing participants. Most importantly, the shift in language obfuscates the main components of the practice (transformation, community, and art) and reduces the work and its impacts to demographic figures.

In their 2004 review of the field, the Community Arts Network found that while community artists are skilled at “translation”, at “learning the language of other fields, and using it to [discuss their work with] people in those fields – they are not yet skilled in the reverse – how to engage other fields in terms of community cultural development.” (p. 20). Their suggestion is that, as we often turn to “story as meta language” we should begin to mobilize the story as a means of explicating our work. They also observe the challenge that this strategy implies, as stories are not often seen as a valid means of discourse or evaluation in our society. While researchers may be increasingly interested in narrative inquiry and qualitative measures, the majority of funders still eschew testimony in favour of quantitative data. It can be frustrating and demoralizing to see a year of work, a year filled with stories, challenges, successes, artistic innovation and unexpected outcomes, reduced to a series of figures in a table.
Impacts on Community Art Organizations and the Field

The current funding structure for community art is unstable and unreliable. This situation creates a range of difficulties for organizations including time consuming fundraising and data collection, difficulty in planning, continuity, and maintaining a long-term process, and negatively impacting our ability to experiment and to fail.

Instability

Community art, due to its mode of production and social purpose, generally does not have the potential to produce a lot of earned income which makes community art organizations particularly reliant on funding. The lack of sufficient funds for operating expenses means that organizations spend a disproportionate amount of time and limited resources fundraising as opposed to making art. There have been attempts to respond to this situation by some funders. For example, the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, and Canada Council for the Arts (all of which support community art projects and organizations) offer multi-year operating funding which provides some stability to organizations for a period of three years.\textsuperscript{54} For multiyear funding, the reporting requirements are simpler, organizations do not have to reapply annually for operating funding, and organizations are assured a base amount of funding for three years as long as they continue to operate in a transparent and responsible manner, i.e., submit audited financial statements, produce artistic work largely as planned, etc. While somewhat lessening the application burden and providing some relief, operating funding is still very

\textsuperscript{54} Some private funders have also made multi-year funding available. For example the George Cedric Metcalf Foundation provides multiyear funding for strategic courses of action, allowing organizations to undertake special projects.
limited for community art work and is certainly not sufficient to cover the costs of operations.55

While operating funding is limited, there is an increasing amount of financial support available for ‘sustainability’: developing fundraising and marketing strategies, working with consultants to make community art organizations more sustainable (where the consultant is paid while the staff must either fit this additional work into their tight schedules or volunteer to work on the project), and creating ‘social enterprises’ to help sustain not-for-profit art groups. In all cases the vast majority of the funding pays for consultants or professionals outside of the company. The goal of these funding programs is to reduce not-for-profit arts organizations’ reliance on external funding and therefore increase their sustainability. And while these strategies may work for establishment art institutions that can for example, regularly charge admission to shows, leverage support from wealthy patrons of the arts, or have a location from which to sell merchandise, for community art organizations the opportunities for generating earned income through these means are limited.

Thus community art organizations are locked in a perpetual cycle of fundraising which makes them extremely vulnerable to the changing priorities of grant makers. For example, after vigorous support of the arts, including community arts through the 1980’s and 1990’s, in 2005, the Laidlaw Foundation shifted its granting priorities to focus on positive youth development and so the only art projects currently funded by Laidlaw focus specifically on youth engagement. With private foundations being responsive to

55 Operating funding is unallocated funding that an organization can choose to spend as needed to support itself and its work.
their own desires rather than the needs of a particular field, community art organizations
can not depend on the continuity of funding programs.

Funders also tend to emphasize project funding in their granting programs. These
are projects that can be completed in a relatively short time frame (often a year), seek to
‘innovate’ new ideas (rather than sustain core activities), and rely on, but tend not to
support, an organizational structure. This focus on project funding makes fundraising a
perpetual activity, eating up a disproportionate amount of time and resources. Relying on
project funding (and not having a secure source of operational funding), creates
instability for organizations making it difficult to engage in organizational planning or to
sustain a course of action. ‘Successful’ projects, once their funding is completed, either
need to be supported by already under-resourced organizations or not be offered again, as
the desire to fund new innovative projects makes very few funders interested in
supporting subsequent offerings or phases of the same project. Project funding often
severely limits the amount of money that can be spent on the administration and
operational expenses necessary in order for the project to be achieved, thus the
organization itself takes on additional costs and an increased work load in order to
complete a ‘funded’ project. In some cases project grants specify that funding can not go
toward the salaries of anyone already working within the organization, and so although
an organization’s staff may be underemployed and underpaid, a new person needs to be
hired in order to fulfill the funders’ guidelines.

TNT (*Tiempos Nuevos Teatro*) calls this focus on ‘the project’ as opposed to a
sustained and consistent body of work ‘project-itis’. Their strategy to combat project-itis
is to internally clearly outline the substance of their work (their organizational goals,
methods, and activities) and then to rename elements of these as a ‘project’. The ‘project’
is merely a portion of their overall work, named and made visible, and most importantly through this mechanism, funded. This is an effective strategy in maintaining an organizational philosophy and the integrity of one’s work (although constantly packaging and repackaging the work in order to secure funding, is time consuming [Adams & Goldbard, 2001]).

In addition to the disproportionate amount of time spent on fundraising, once funds are secured the data collection required to meet funders’ reporting criteria is onerous. This is especially so for public funding as governments seek to justify arts spending according to its social and economic impacts. Due to the need to patch together funding from a variety of sources for one project, often at the end of a project we are faced with filling out multiple reports each with its own reporting criteria, objectives, and indicators.

There have been attempts by funders to ease reporting requirements for art organizations applying for and receiving operating grants. An example of this is CADAC (Canadian Arts Data / Données sur les arts au Canada), a single location and format for arts organizations to report operating budgets, audited financial reports, and statistical data. The purpose of this database is two fold: to allow arts organizations to submit data once in one format to a single source rather than having to reformat and adapt it for each individual funder, and to provide aggregate data to allow for the analysis of the Canadian art sector, and of course its social and economic impact (www.thecadac.ca). Although it is less time consuming to submit financial data this way, not all funders are a part of this initiative and so some re-formattting of data is still required when filing out funding applications. The statistical data required by CADAC has also created a huge burden on community arts organizations. The amount of data required is considerable and the kinds
of data required are not necessarily those of interest to community art organizations.\textsuperscript{56} This has meant that organizations have had to create new internal data collection and reporting systems in order to fulfill CADAC requirements. In general the amount of oversight required for relatively modest sums of money is staggering.

The instability of the funding system creates instability for organizations. The changing grant programs, changing deadlines for funding applications and fund distribution, arduous reporting requirements, and grant-makers’ focus on time-limited project funding, make it difficult for organizations to plan their work. With community art organizations under constant threat of closure due to lack of funds, it is difficult to develop a strategic course of action for transformation.

\textit{The Inability to Fail}

The lack of stable operating funding and the project-itis approach to funding have had an impact on the field’s constructions of failure. All of our projects tend to succeed, at least on paper, because we do not want to jeopardize future funding. With funders driving the dialogue through conferences there is limited space for community artists and community art workers to speak honestly about failure amongst themselves. This inability to discuss failure removes honest conversation from the field about ‘best practices’ and equally important ‘worst practices’. Failure is a valuable process, it is how we grow and learn. Constructing the field of community art on the model of perpetual success limits us. Unstable time-limited funding takes away the ability to experiment, to try new things that may or may not be ‘successful’. Ironically a system designed to promote innovation through funding new projects, actually limits experimentation due to the inability to fail.

\textsuperscript{56} CADAC is attempting to ‘standardize’ the statistical data available on the arts sector in Canada.
A focus toward meeting targets and achieving indicators also does not allow us to be responsive to a process as it unfolds. Perhaps the large-scale workshops we had planned (in order to make a project attractive to funders by having high participation numbers) are not the most effective way to approach the work. Perhaps small intensive workshops would better serve our purpose, but then, would the project ‘fail’ in the eyes of funders because it did not achieve its participant indicator? The inability to fail keeps us locked into project parameters set out in funding applications written months prior to the start of the project. This situation puts community artists and community art workers in an uncomfortable position. There are two options: change our work processes to adhere to funding guidelines and program indicators or choose the process that best serves our needs and risk future funding.

Summary

Funding is a complex issue that impacts and shapes the field in numerous ways. The current structure of funding, the focus on time-limited project funding, the disproportionate level of oversight for small amounts of money, the rigorous quantitative reporting requirements, and the intensive data collection, are all means of bringing a radical practice under social control. How can community artists, community art workers, and community art organizations maintain the transformative nature of our work in the face of funders skewing the field toward their aims? Reliable operating funding would go a long way toward supporting the field by “reduce[ing] community artists’ vulnerability to censorship or political attack, breaking the potentially punitive cycle whereby a group is only as secure as its last project” (Adams & Goldbard, p. 96). As a field we must also develop a language through which to explicate our work in order to keep it from dissolving into a social service. The radicality of the practice as an
innovative artistic movement and a transformational practice for social change must be maintained and reflected in our discourse. In order to develop our discourse and preserve the critical nature of our practice we must develop our own spaces and mechanisms to share our experiences of both success and failure.

*Co-optation*

Honour Ford-Smith asks, “…in whose interests does funded community art operate?” (2001, p. 12). Community art developed out of the reframing of learning and consciousness in popular education, the democratization of art in community art education, a commitment to social justice in activist art, and the desire for art to be part of daily life. Community art as a practice was constituted on these values, all of which are critical of the prevailing hegemony. As with all radical practices, sooner or later the forces of hegemonic power recognize the potency and possibility of the practice and seek to bend it to promote their own needs and extend their agenda. In this section I will review first, what makes community art such a cooptable practice, second the impacts of cooptation on community art, and third how we as a field can resist cooptation.

*Why is Community Art so easily Coopted?*

Community art is vulnerable to cooptation through its reliance on our current funding models. Community art too easily fills the needs of the state. It is cheaper to implement than the social services whose budgets have been slashed under successive neoliberal governments. For these reasons it is useful as a way to justify funding of the arts. Its creative and participatory approach is appealing to governments who want to be seen trying something ‘innovative’ in response to entrenched social ills and by the populations that are identified to benefit from its programming. Government agencies

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57 As opposed to framing art and culture as vital parts of society for their own sake, the social impact of community art can be used to justify art and culture budgets.
and private foundations are increasingly interested in ‘partnering’ with community art organizations, yet the ‘partner’ with control of the finances can hardly be considered an equal ‘partner’ (Pacific, 2001). Through changing funding priorities and exercising granting decisions, governments, corporations, and private foundations can appear to be promoting a progressive social agenda while actually supporting organizations and projects with safe ‘assistentialist’\textsuperscript{58} or beautification goals while denying funding to organizations with more radical social change agendas. At the least, the cooptation of community art can be innocuous like Toronto’s ‘Live with Culture’ program which, as Darren O’Donnell notes, “while perhaps fun for the kids on a lazy Sunday, does nothing to attend to any of the real indicators of civic health: housing, public transit, employment, immigrant services, etc.” (2006, p. 23). At worst, community art can be recruited to work in antithesis to the field’s core beliefs and values, for example, by helping to foster public acceptance for urban renewal projects which often have a disastrous effects on cities’ most vulnerable populations. “In a ‘things go down better with public art’ mentality, the bitter pills of development are delivered to the public” (Baca, 1995, p.132).

Language can be an important tool in the process of cooptation. The social service language that has crept into the field in response to the requirements of funding proposals and reports eases the process of cooptation. How can we distinguish ourselves from social services if we are employing their language? Community art projects can begin to be become indistinguishable from social services, with the exceptions of perhaps appearing to be a bit more ‘fun’ and of offering greater opportunities for promotion and publicity through heartwarming photo opportunities.

\textsuperscript{58} ‘Assistentialist’ is the English translation of the Spanish term \textit{Assistencialismo} which refers to providing assistance to improve the situation of vulnerable people without addressing the underlying issues of oppression that created their vulnerability. In other words ‘assistentialist’ programs help people to adapt and survive within an unjust society.
Community Art and Social Services

It is however, important to distinguish between community art and social services and to recognize the limitations of community art in responding to pressing social needs. Vecinos had to close their Youth Theatre Group because it became too dangerous to keep operating in light of increasing crack consumption by a significant portion of youth in the group.59 As the youth’s addictions deepened their behaviour became more erratic and they began to engage in robbery and assault to fuel their habits. The youth still wanted to participate in the program however; they still saw Vecinos as a second home. Their behaviour though, had moved beyond the staff’s capabilities to manage it. It was no longer an issue of refusing entry to youth when they were high and welcoming them back when they were straight in order to encourage them to consume less. Vecinos does not have expertise in addictions counseling or harm reduction. Their mission is primarily preventative in relation to social ills. They aim to provide opportunities for children and youth through programming that will limit their exposure to ‘risky behaviour’.60

How could a community art project manage this rapidly changing and increasingly dangerous social reality? Project staff feared that if they barred drug addicted youth from the program, they would create divisions in the neighbourhood between youth who continued in theatre and youth who were excluded. They feared that such an action would incite violence in the form of reprisals against the youth who continued in the project, as well as on the centre itself. There was also difficulty in drawing the line. At what point was a youth considered ‘drug addicted’? Could casual drug users still

59 Crack was having a major impact on Sagrada Familia at the time. Levels of consumption and sale in the neighbourhood were rising and an entire street had become nothing but ‘bunkers’, points of sale for drugs. Incidents of violence and assaults were rising rapidly.

60 For example, Vecinos identifies offering “alternative recreation to prevent social risks like drugs, crime, violence and discrimination” (p. 1) as part of the purpose of their version of the Lo Creo project (Annex 5 / Country project Documents / Costa Rica, attached to Regional Programme Document Culture - locality and creativity. (2002). Unpublished document.)
participate as long as they were not high at the time? In the end, the staff decided that their only option was to close the group entirely: to continue to provide programming in this situation would only increase the likelihood of violence by creating a division that was outside of the centre’s ability to contain and support.

The introduction of a highly addictive and cheap drug to a low income neighbourhood, limited employment and social opportunities for young people, and a lack of adequate and accessible social services all combined to create a situation that was far beyond the capacity of a community art project to respond to. Youth spent between 3 and 6 hours a week in Vecinos, the rest of the time they were outside of this microtopia of support and were living in and confronting a social reality that was becoming increasingly difficult and dangerous. I do not mean to imply that Vecinos’ community art project was meant to take the place of a drug addiction centre or that they received funding for a ‘drug prevention through the arts’ project while government programs for drug addiction were being cut. I use the example as a cautionary tale about the limitations of community art to confront difficult social realities and the need for adequate social services. The Southern Neighbourhoods of San José could really use an addiction centre. If an addiction centre existed, Vecinos could have provided cultural and artistic programming to the centre, while issues of addiction were dealt with by qualified professionals. Community art cannot and should not take the place of social services.

The Effects of Cooptation on Community Art

What happens to community art when it is coopted? We can examine the impact of cooptation on community art by exploring its impact on the practice’s constitutive elements: ‘transformation’, ‘community’, and ‘art’. Coopted community art can take different forms. Cooptation can impact the transformational possibility of the practice,
undermine the very idea of community, and/or reduce art to bland-art, bad-art or non-art. Cooptation domesticates the practice and attempts to limit, contain or pervert the possibilities for change located within the practice.

When radical practices are coopted and lose their mandate for transformation they can become nothing more than de-politicized techniques that can be applied to any purpose. A clear example is the way that, especially in the West, popular education as a liberatory practice, is often confused with or interpreted solely as being its participatory techniques. These techniques however, can be applied in any number of processes regardless of political purpose. These purposes can range from liberation, to assistance programs aimed at helping vulnerable people to improve their situation without addressing the underlying issues of oppression, to actually working to maintain oppressive structures and systems through ‘pseudoparticipation’. (Kane, 2001; Vargas & Bustillos de Núñez, 1999). Augusto Boal, who developed Forum Theatre as a means to challenge oppression, is clear that while adaptations and deviations from his methods are needed and acceptable in order to respond to local needs and conditions, uses of Forum Theatre which are treasonous to the basic philosophical basis of the form are unacceptable and not Theatre of the Oppressed. As an example he recounts a case of ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ being sponsored by employers in businesses to improve workers’ productivity; Boal views this as the antithesis of Forum Theatre (Boal, 2002, p. 9) and it is a clear example of cooptation. Clearly, community art which developed as a radical anti-establishment practice can be domesticated by the interests of capital and the state by ‘techniquifying’ a radical practice. Once a radical practice loses its progressive agenda, it can become a series of techniques that can be used by anyone for any purpose.
With its interest in superficial cultural activities and under the guise of ‘inclusiveness’, coopted community art can subvert the very idea of community reducing it to demographic information and reinforcing “enclaves of race, culture, age and gender” (O’Donnell, 2006, p.23). Funders require community artists to define the populations they work with and to record statistical data on the number of youth, seniors, ethnic minorities, and disadvantaged or ‘priority neighbourhoods’ (as they are termed in Toronto) involved in programming. This approach to ‘social inclusion’ undermines the very concept of community by reinforcing the idea of homogeneity in communities, especially in communities defined as different from the dominant norm. When we reduce communities to statistical information, internal differences within communities are erased. Communities are heterogeneous and not formed by any one ‘category’ of people. Communities are also not made up of only seniors, children, or newcomers. One of the goals of community art is to ‘build community’. This is simply not happening when we work with people separately in ‘silos’ of populations. This is a dehumanizing practice in direct contrast with the aims of community art. In community art we say ‘everyone is welcome’. “Well is everyone welcome, or is it just some sector of the population that is?” (R. Howard, presentation, March 20, 2008). In coopted community art, only some people are ‘targeted’ for inclusion, generally those identified as being in situations of risk or social exclusion, but they are welcomed only as a one-dimensional statistic - as a number filled in as an indicator, not as an individual, and certainly not as an individual

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61 This does not imply that T.C.A. practices cannot occur during work with ‘youth’ or ‘seniors’ or that work with different populations cannot be a part of a T.C.A. project. Ideally however, we should at some point seek to connect these populations to the rest of their community or engage in cross-population work in order to bring people together within their communities.

62 Ruth Howard presentation in small group ‘Art Makes a New Commons’ at the Art at the Hub Symposium.
with a multiple or hybrid identity. All of the complexity and diversity that make our communities such rich sites of resistance, are undermined in coopted community art.

Co-opted community art, with its eye on superficial cultural activities and/or personal and social development indicators, can easily corrupt the art in community art. This is the very aspect of the practice that has the power to inspire, engage, and transform. When community art becomes coopted the power of art is hobbled and disempowered. Coopted community art can reduce art to bland-art when the emphasis is on social praxis (Claire Bishop, 2006b), bad-art when art is mobilized as recreation (Baca as cited in Korza, Schaffer Bacon, & Assaf, 2005), or non-art when form and aesthetics are sacrificed as elitist (Marcuse as cited in Becker 1994a). Cooptation of community art tames art and robs it of its radical power to inspire, to provoke, to imagine, and to create alternative visions for the future. As Boal noted,

The most important thing, over and above anything else, is that Forum Theatre should be good theatre; the model in itself offers a source of aesthetic pleasure. Before the ‘forum’ part begins, the show itself must be watchable and well constructed. (2002 p. 256)

This is because it is the power of the form that opens up the possibility for change. It is the language of, in this case theatre, that allows people to try on different versions of themselves and to participate in a “rehearsal of the revolution” (1974/1985 p. 155). When cooptation devalues and degrades form and aesthetics, community art loses the power of art which is its transformative component.

**Resistance**

In light of the ease with which community art can be coopted and the detrimental impact that cooptation can have on our practice, our communities, and our art, it is vital that we mobilize strategies of resistance. How can we as a field of practice resist
cooptation? The following strategies will allow transformative community art “to preserve its function as a meaningful critical social intervention and work against its domestication” (Ford-Smith, 2001, p. 13). First, it is vital that community art stay connected to communities, rather than only to academia, the government, or institutions. Second, it is important to create spaces for Transformative Community Artists to communicate amongst themselves away from funders and researchers so that we can reinforce our practice and values, and talk honestly about our work. Third, we need to maintain the language of our practice, and resist employing social service language in order to emphasize its distinctiveness. Fourth, we need to embrace a heterogeneous understanding of community to include a wide cross-section of the population and to resist reinforcing or reproducing enclaves by working solely with populations in isolation. Fifth, we need to maintain a focus on innovative forms and discuss and disseminate communications on the importance of aesthetics in our work. Sixth, we should push for increased arm’s length public funding of community art through art councils, especially multi-year funding which provides stability allowing for increased possibilities for experimentation and innovation. Seventh, we should maintain a critical perspective toward government and private funding and explore alternative forms of funding. And eighth, we need to develop a clarity in our language, as I am attempting to do by developing the concept of transformative community art, so that we can distinguish our practices from any art project carried out in a community setting regardless of its purpose. Mobilizing this diverse range of strategies will help

63 Some grassroots funding programs like InCubate, FEAST and The Fire This Time Fund (Rose, 2009) might serve as funding models to help sustain radical work. Presently the dollar amounts generated through these programs are quite modest, however these models may be able to be expanded in the future as interest in alternative funding models grows.
transformative community art to resist cooptation and to maintain its mandate as a radical practice.

**Institutionalisation**

Whether it is the creation of university degree or certification programs, the addition of community artists to roles within state institutions such as planning departments, town councils, and parks departments, or the increasing incorporation of community art and community art practices into establishment art and culture institutions like galleries and museums, community art is becoming increasingly institutionalized. This new status raises numerous challenges for a field that developed largely in opposition to institutions as artists and art educators sought to democratize art by taking it out of institutions and into the community. Can a radical practice that developed in opposition to institutions be institutionalized and still maintain its radical stance? Can what is “essentially an activating and liberating enterprise…be institutionalized without a loss of integrity and connection to the community?” (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, p. 69).

In this section I will explore some of the challenges inherent in the professionalisation of community art, the challenges and opportunities that academic attention to community art is bringing to the field, and examine the complex relationship between community art and institutions in general.

**Professionalisation**

As Leah Houston notes in her thesis on integrative feminisms and community art, “professional accreditation and standardization are often tools of homogenization and control that requires (sic) an allegiance to mainstream values and beliefs” (Bunch, 1987 and Chicago, 1996, as cited by Houston, 2007, p. 64). How can community art maintain the flexibility and wide range of practice it has developed over decades in light of the
increasing push to professionalisation? How can we resist standardization? How can we maintain the radical nature of community art and keep it from dissolving into a collection of ‘techniques’? How can we maintain the field’s core values of participation, freedom of expression, and radical social change from within the bureaucracy of institutions of the state?

All fields of practice need to find ways of consolidating, extending, and developing themselves by accumulating and disseminating knowledge and skills (Adams & Goldbard, 2001). Traditionally community art has done this through mentorship and hands-on training. Community artists take on multiple and varied roles that incorporate a wide range of diverse skills. The seemingly overwhelming list of tasks that we have to perform includes: recruiter (of participants), organizer (of programs, spaces, materials, human resources), investigator (of community issues and community resources), project liaison (to community leaders, funders, government offices, institutions, media, and businesses), negotiator (to balance the needs and desires of groups, and artist’s and community’s aesthetics), cultural promoter (to advocate for the importance of art and cultural projects), community builder (provide conflict resolution, facilitation of group dynamics), project manager (budgets, program planning, assessment), educator (use effective pedagogy, explore social reality in an empowering fashion, teach appropriate artistic skills), activist (promote social change actions), social supporter (have the tools to manage crisis and trauma, knowledge of local service providers for referrals), motivator (keep the process moving through adversity, keep people engaged) and of course artistic director (provide technical expertise and framework for artistic project, oversee aesthetic). The diversity and complexity of this range of skills cross over multiple academic disciplines: art, sociology, education, psychology, community
development, project management, etc. This, combined with the locality of community art where appropriate methodology, community engagement techniques, and artistic forms and aesthetics are developed from the specificity of the location and the communities involved, provides a clear argument for the effectiveness of hands-on, on-the-ground training in a variety of contexts and community art projects or organizations.\(^\text{64}\)

As pressure for certification, diploma, and degree programs from universities increase and as the drive for ‘professionalisation’ in our culture accelerates, how can we resist the homogenization and standardization of the field? While my personal preference would be to continue community art’s mentoring tradition, it is not possible to turn back time. Numerous university-level community art programs already exist and more will likely be developed as interest in the field grows. What then should be the relationship between the models of community art training through mentorship and community art training through academia? How can we ensure that certification programs do not have a negative impact on the field? If community art becomes an important part of training in a range of artistic disciplines from dance to music, are we in danger of developing a ‘conservatory approach’ to community art? What if community art becomes a hip art school option not tied to transformative agendas? This would be the inverse of the goal of community art practice, producing ‘art stars’ on the backs of often marginalized populations, rather than working for transformation with communities.

\(^{64}\) Increasingly community art organizations are providing their own training programs through workshops, seminars, and intensive courses. These initiatives ensure that the diversity of localized practices are preserved, that emerging community artists learn skills in connection with communities and organizations, and that organizations produce artists compatible with their ideological approach and working methodologies that can then be hired in the future.
What does it mean to place people graduating from degree or diploma programs in community art in community? Traditionally people come to community art because of a commitment to the work, to the issue, to the community, or to an innovative art practice that impacts directly on society rather than reflecting it. What would it mean to community art if the practice became an employment option? Brandi Rose, a graduate student in the Arts in Youth and Community Development program at Columbia College, has written an interesting article about her increasing disillusionment with ‘changing the world’ as a career path (2009). Raising concerns about the institutionalization of social justice movements from cooption by foundations, to concerns about NGO’s charged with changing the world taking on the very structures of corporations and the institutions of power, to the increasing corporatisation of education, and the disconnection between current movements, the grassroots, and the activism of the 60’s and 70’s, she writes, “I am [concerned] that I am being groomed for a role that I don’t want” (¶ 6). She recognizes that “accepted knowledge reinforced by graduate programs like (hers)” will serve her in the current tough economic climate, but also that she must be willing to discard this sanctified knowledge, “as necessary’. It is this “as necessary” that I find particularly interesting. In light of her argument I interpret it as meaning that she will discard the knowledge and practices learned in her graduate program when she finds them to be in conflict with her social justice aims or the needs or desires of the youth and communities she will be working with. This kind of flexibility will be necessary as students forge links between academia and the grass-roots practice of community art.

How will people graduating from university with degrees related to community art impact a practice that has revolved around mentorship and hands-on learning? Will
this create “a special class of community cultural development workers” removed from the communities in which we work? (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, p. 69) What will this shift do to the construction of professionalism within the field? How will the experience of community artists ‘approved’ by the institutions of knowledge compare with, or relate to, the numerous volunteers, and part-time, or occasional workers who are the mainstay of the practice? (Adams & Goldbard)

David Anderson the founding Artistic Director of Clay & Paper Theatre never attended theatre school, he learned his craft at Vancouver Street Theatre and Bread Baker’s Theatre. He continued developing his work through his first company Whole Loaf Theatre and through collaborating, visiting, and sharing with numerous community artists and community art organizations. David has been creating community-based theatre in public space for over 40 years and is recognized as a leader in the field. He has founded two public space theatre companies, performed and directed plays across Canada, in the United States, Russia, and Europe, and directed more than 35 productions. Clearly David is a professional in his field. What happens to our notion of ‘professional’ when we have students graduating from degree and diploma programs in community arts as well as emerging community artists following the more traditional course in the field of mentoring? Are we in danger of creating two ‘tiers’ of community art professionals?

Those who developed, grew, and trained in the practice (in the work) and those who went to school?

One strategy to resist standardization of the practice is to develop programs that in structure and form mirror the values of community art practice; training practices that

David was recognized with the prestigious Chalmers Arts Fellowship in 2007, was a finalist for the William Kilbourn Award for the Celebration of Toronto’s Cultural Life in 2008, received a Davenport Community Builders Award in 2009, and was a finalist for the 2011 Premier’s Award for Excellence in the Arts.
are democratic, participatory, and connected to the work (Adams & Goldbard, 2001). This means that the main insulator against bringing community art under control through professionalisation is to ensure that training and certification programs have strong links to community and community art organizations.\(^{66}\) This will keep emerging community artists connected to the roots of the practice. It is imperative that any community art program include extensive and multiple co-op, internship, or practicum components in order to keep community art close to its base.\(^{67}\) Including in-depth placements with various community art organizations exposes students to the range of work and connects them to localized practices that are organic responses to the issues on the ground. This practice insulates students against conceiving of community art as a globalized standard practice and range of techniques that can be applied universally regardless of context.

*Academia and Community Art*

Academic attention to the practice of community art opens up a lot of opportunities for the field. Some of these opportunities have practical applications for the field in addition to the academy’s traditional roles of theorizing and raising previously unthought concerns. The interest of researchers, for example, allows for documentation and dissemination of our work. This increases our recognition and provides us with documents that we can use to further promote ourselves. With the development of practicums and internships as part of some community art programs as well as within the range of artistic disciplines that now recognize the community as a legitimate location in which to work, we can count on having free or cheap student labour to support our

\(^{66}\) Here I am referring strictly to certification and training programs designed to produce community artists through the academy.

\(^{67}\) Academic institutions developing student internships with local community art organizations is a complex issue that can bring benefits to organizations (cheap or free labour) but can also be problematic (what does it mean when academic institutions receive tuition fees for semesters that students spend training in under-resourced community art organizations?). Issues relating to the relationship between academics and community art are taken up in the following section.
under-resourced, overworked, and understaffed organizations. For example, at Clay &
Paper Theatre in the last year alone we have had a practicum student from the
Community Arts Program at York University who is supporting both artistic and
administrative tasks around two of our annual events, a co-op student from The Dramatic
Arts Co-op Program at Brock University who stage managed our summer show, and a
practicum student from Sheridan College’s Design Program who designed and made
several costumes for our Night of Dread parade and pageant.

While having a student placed with us who is adaptable to our work environment
and who has a range of useful skills to support our work is a great help, the reverse can
certainly be true. It can be challenging and time consuming for a small organization to
orient and train a student who will only be with the organization for a short time.
Students often do not have a sense of the limited time and resources with which we work.
As community art organizations often work with marginalized populations on low
budgets and with few resources there can be a gap between the location from which the
organization is working and where the student is coming from. The student may be out of
touch with the reality of the organizational culture and the social and economic
conditions of the communities we work with. Power, privilege, and uneven resources
need to be taken into account when negotiating student placement. When students
approach community art work from a position of privilege, with a sense of entitlement,
unrealistic expectations, or lack of respect for the reality of the organization and what
support and resources can be afforded to them, they can become a burden on already
under-resourced, over-worked organizations.

The rising interest in the field from academia has also meant a sharp increase in
the number of requests for interviews, information, materials and to fill out surveys, all
of which add up to a lot of time consuming work. Sometimes I have wanted to throw up my hands and say; ‘we don’t exist solely for the purpose of filling in your five page survey’. Some student researchers also do not have a sense of ethical responsibility toward our organizations – to provide us with information such as the fruits of their research. Student researchers who fail to provide their results back to participating organizations and artists are a drain on limited resources. Such students also miss the opportunity to disseminate their findings which could benefit community artists, community art organizations, and the entire field. Finally the interests of academia may not be in line with the interests on the ground. While research has an important role to play in bringing to light new issues and areas of analysis for the field, community artists and community art workers would like concerns identified through our practice to also be addressed. A productive relationship between the academy and the field of practice needs to be developed to ensure that issues from the field are examined by the academy and that research engendered by the academy reaches the field.

The Relationship Between Community Art and Institutions

As community art becomes institutionalized, opportunities arise for community artists to work as part of the state. This has been more prevalent in the UK and Australia where the community art field has a longer history and was actively promoted for a time by left-wing governments, but this trend is progressing in Canada and the United States as well (Pacific, 1999b). What does it mean for a practice intent on transformation to work within the state? Is it possible to achieve transformative change from within a conservative bureaucratic institution? Are their ways that transformative community art can utilize institutions in order to achieve transformative change?
Suzanne Lacy has noted the importance of using art to transform social institutions. She observes that institutional change will have a longer-term impact on a community than the experience of directly participating in a community-engaged art project. Lacy does not discount the profound impacts that community-engaged art projects can have on individuals or public perception. However, referring to her own work over a period of 10 years with and for youth in Oakland California in which she engaged actively with public schools, health institutions, and the police, she states that “the institutions that would continue to affect the lives of Oakland youth remained substantially and programmatically unchanged” (2005, pp. 205). She further notes that while institutions are appealing as a “potential site for change” that there is also a significant barrier in “institutional resistance to change”, and wonders about the ongoing impact and legacy of art projects on institutions. Despite her own experience in Oakland, Lacy maintains that “if the goal of social change through art is to change the conditions of people’s lives, that change will take place perhaps in large part by embedding it within the institutions that create and maintain public policies” (pp. 206).

The Austrian artists’ collective WochenKlausur is an interesting example of transformative community art utilizing institutions as a way to achieve social change. WochenKlausur uses the social capital of art to make concrete changes in human

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68 WochenKlausur can be translated as “weeks of closure”. The name emphasizes the collective’s ‘closed-session’ working method and commitment to completing projects in a limited time-frame, usually 6 to 8 weeks (www.wochenklausur.at, method section, ¶ 4).

69 WochenKlausur demonstrates the flexibility of the category of transformative art. The intention of their art is clearly located in a transformational perspective; they aim to transform both the category of art and the socio-political sphere. The community receives a social good as an outcome and many projects focus on fostering community engagement in social and civic issues. Finally WochenKlausur approaches their work as art; they work from establishment art institutions and leverage the social, cultural, and political capital of art to achieve concrete change. The manipulation of “social circumstances is a practice of art just as valid as the manipulation of traditional [artistic] materials” (www.wochenklausur.at, art section, ¶ 20).
The collective directs their artistic practice toward solving a localized problem using sociopolitical relationships as materials. To date they have completed 31 projects that have made “a small contribution to the transformation of society” (www.wochenklausur.at, FAQ, ¶ 30). WochenKlausur chooses projects that are concrete, small-scale, and time-limited (usually 8 weeks, the length of time of an average exhibition). They bring their creativity as artists to the project of manipulating social reality in order to make positive changes in the conditions of social life and the social institutions that people interact with. WochenKlausur creates the possibility for the project to be realized utilizing resources, organizations, and institutions that exist in the community. They organize and locate the human and financial resources necessary for the project within the community, bring groups and individuals representing disparate community interests together, and create a structure in which community members can work together to solve their problems.

An example of WochenKlausur’s approach to establishing a shelter for drug addicted prostitutes in Zurich provides an example of their working methods. To organize the shelter, Wochenklausur invited politicians, service providers, police chiefs, newspaper editors, medical specialists, attorneys, and drug addicted sex trade workers on a series of 5 hour boat rides. After 2 weeks, 60 stakeholders had participated. Participants were able to discuss the issues away from outside interference and come to an agreement about providing the shelter. Funding was secured first from private donors and subsequently from all levels of government. This intervention, as all of WochenKlausur’s projects, was approached as art. WochenKlausur operated out of Shedhalle, an institution

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70 WochenKlausur engages in what they term ‘social intervention art’; since their inception in 1993 have not produced a single art object or performance piece but rather made concrete interventions in social reality. The collective operates self-consciously from an art perspective: making use of the mythos of the art world to transform both society and the possibilities open to artistic practice. WochenKlausur’s art is in the effective and creative manipulation of socio-political relations.
for contemporary art who had invited them. They leveraged their cultural capital to arrange for the boat rides and get the decision makers on board. Their approach was novel, creative, and ‘tricky’; it was also effective. It is unlikely that the shelter could have been arranged through standard political channels as programs supporting drug addicts had recently been cut and this was a major election issue at the time. 

WochenKlausur was able to bring people together from different sides of a contentious issue who normally would not meet or engage with each other. The boat ride context allowed them to encounter each other as people in a face-to-face context and to engage with each other personally rather than bureaucratically. As a result of this transformational space where social relations were altered, stakeholders were able to address a social issue in a creative and satisfying way. The transformed social relations were ephemeral, contained within a 5 hour boat journey. WochenKlausur’s involvement was short-term, an 8 week residency. Yet the impact of WochenKlausur’s work and the resulting changed relations; the partnerships formed, the funding commitments made, the media support to influence public opinion, the program plan, and the political will to carry it out, went on to benefit numerous women during the 6 years of the shelter’s operation.  

Other projects completed by WochenKlausur through interventions in existing institutions and socio-political relations include establishing a mobile health unit for the homeless in Vienna, founding an upcycling cooperative to provide jobs and contribute to reclaiming and reusing materials in Linz, facilitating a democratic process for the design of a church square in Krems, creating a social service agency to improve conditions in a

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71 WochenKlausur admits to stretching the truth in order to get different stakeholders on the boat. For example, by saying one party would only attend if the other party would.

72 The shelter was closed when the City of Zurich cancelled its funding of the project.
deportation detention centre in Salzburg, creating a discussion platform on city issues for marginalized residents in a neighbourhood profoundly affected by renewal projects in The Hague, and creating a Berlin workstation to help unemployed people develop and realize their ideas of what they could do for work. Thus WochenKlausur’s art “seeks to examine and improve the conditions of coexistence” (www.wochenklausur.at, art section, ¶ 17). Their art “leads…toward the cooperative shaping of life in society” (art section, ¶ 18). In each project WochenKlausur works closely with a range of institutions to secure funding, ongoing project management, resources, and space, directly intervening in institutions’ approaches to social issues, and sometimes even creating new institutions to respond in an innovative way to social need.

WochenKlausur’s work is interesting to examine in response to Lacy’s questions about the impact of socially-engaged art on institutions and the possibilities for long-term change. Most of the projects mentioned above are still operating. Other projects were time-limited, outlived their need or were partially implemented. For example, only some of the recommendations for the re-design of the church square presented to the City of Krems by working groups were implemented, and the coordinating committee for the upcycling cooperative in Linz operated for 2 years after which it was no longer needed as networks had been developed between designers, industry and customers. Indeed out of the seven examples\(^{73}\) of WochenKlausur’s work that I have referred to in this paper, only the shelter for drug addicted women in Zurich has been discontinued despite ongoing need.

\(^{73}\) In choosing 7 examples out of 31 projects completed to demonstrate WochenKlausir’s work, I did not aim to choose ‘successful’ projects. I sought to present a range of experiences; from creating new institutions, to creating opportunities for civic participation. I also chose projects from different countries and from along WochenKlausur’s trajectory of work from 1993 to 2006, and I of course chose projects that caught my eye, projects that I was particularly and personally interested in. Note: WochenKlausur continues to operate. At the time of writing English project descriptions were only available for work up until 2006.
There are a number of interesting things to note here. While in T.C.A we often speak of long-term engagement with a community, all of WochenKlausur’s projects mentioned above were developed and initiated in a single residency of between 4 and 11 weeks. 74 Most projects were sustained due to WochenKlausur’s intervention in the institutions that impact on the lives of those served by the projects. Instigating public discourse about the social issue in question, including a savvy use of the media to pressure institutions into change, was an important part of each project. While there will always be some instability due to changing political will, the projects developed and initiated in a just a few short weeks, have shown a remarkable stability over time.

There is an interesting balance between using social institutions for art, manipulating them in ways to produce positive changes in social reality, 75 and being coopted by institutions that wish to use community art as a way to deliver cheap social services in appealing packages. Another interesting note in terms of institutionalization is the way in which WochenKlausur wields the social capital of art to achieve their goals. WochenKlausur relies on establishment art institutions 76 and the appellation of art in order to achieve their remarkably successful interventions in institutions (and ultimately social reality). As art galleries and museums increasingly embrace the very forms of art that were developed in opposition to them as arbitrators and bestowers of the honourific of ‘art’, WochenKlausur provides an example of how that interest can be used to transform social reality from the location of an art institution.

74 This timeline is especially interesting. The community art discourse is very focused on long-term engagement with communities, however WochenKlausur has shown how a short-term project that engages the institutions and social actors that already exist in the community, can have a long-term impact.
75 Darren O’Donnell calls using the institutions that make up the fabric of civil society as materials from which to make art, an “aesthetic of civil engagement”. He states that if governments want to make culture a central part of civic life, than as an artist he wants to use the institutions that form the city as materials for his art practice (2006, p.24).
76 WochenKlausur requires an invitation from an art institution (gallery, museum, cultural centre) before they will start work; this provides them with cultural capital and an infrastructure to work from.
Summary

Transformative Community Art is facing diverse challenges from funding practices, cooptation, and institutionalization. As was discussed in this chapter however, there are multiple strategies that we can employ to resist these forces of standardization and control. We have to maintain a critical perspective if we are to resist the erosion of the political purpose of our practice which Adams and Golbard identify as “nothing less than the enlivening of democracy in the face of globalization” (p. 78). If Transformative Community Art loses its transformative agenda through any of these pressures, the field will return to aspects of its roots, becoming merely *art in the community* or *art as a tool* once more.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

Suzanne Lacy re-framed the field in 1995 by developing ‘new genre public art’. In 2003, she changed the conversation with her notion of ‘socially-engaged art’, stating in the process that “each new naming functions to further discourse” (p. 204). Through re-articulating the current field of practice as Transformative Community Art, I have endeavoured to further the discourse.

Through examining the development of the field from its roots in art education, public art, popular education, and personal and social amelioration, I have demonstrated that community art today has developed to the point where it can be recognized as a distinct field of practice separate from the fields that engendered it. In 2001 Adams and Goldbard identified legitimation, that is, the recognition of community cultural development as a field, as the most fundamental need facing the practice of community art. To this end I have proposed Transformative Community Art as an appropriate term to re-inscribe the current field of practice as it makes transformation the visible goal of the practice while referencing the complex relationships between transformation, community, and art. Emphasizing these three components of practice shifts the discourse away from the binary construction of process/product that has troubled the field since its inception. ‘Community Art’ has been used too widely and too indiscriminately to identify the field of practice and provide the function of recognition. After building the case for Transformative Community Art as an appropriate and useful term, I mobilized the concept through an example of T.C.A. to further develop and substantiate this framework for theorizing practice. Finally, I examined funding, cooptation, and institutionalisation as challenges to transformative community art as a radical practice for social change and artistic innovation.
Transformative Community Art is a flexible and useful term that allows for a wide range of innovative practice - from ‘art stars’ working with or for the benefit of communities to the most humble project run by a solo artist with limited resources on a volunteer basis in their own neighbourhood. For example, when I first came across the work of the Austrian collective WochenKlausur, I was not sure how I could position and understand their work. I then undertook an analysis of their work mobilizing the framework of T.C.A. and found that they fit comfortably within the concept. They work for the transformation of both art and social reality. Their work benefits communities by addressing expressed needs within communities and often focuses on community engagement in the civic realm. They work self-consciously from the established art-world as artists and see the manipulation of socio-political relationships as a valid artistic practice. As well, their work is recognized by others as art. Art has always been nominalist (Mitchell, 2005), that is, art is what we say it is. WochenKlausur states that things are “not a priori art or not art” (www.wochenklausur.at, FAQ, ¶ 8). They maintain that their work is art rather than activism because their “activities are carried out by artists at the invitation of art institutions and are recognized by a community as art” (FAQ, ¶ 23). Therefore they are art. In other words, the appellation of art comes from sanctioned art institutions. This is a somewhat difficult route to the justification of the work of T.C.A. as art as one of the main roots of the movement was a resistance to conventional cultural institutions as the bestowers of the category of art. However, the point is that art is what we say it is, what people want it to be, and what is recognized by a group of people as art. After years of fighting to have their work seen as art rather than social work, education, or community development, community artists in Ontario have seen both the Ontario and Toronto Arts Councils add separate granting streams for
community arts and the Canada Council add grants for community art through their Artist and Community Collaboration Program. Community artists maintained that their work was art, and it has now been recognized as such. In the previous examples, the appellation of art came from establishment art institutions and funding bodies. However this recognition could come from a variety of sources such as the communities an artist is working with, other community artists, or community art organizations such as the Neighbourhood Arts Network or Community Arts Ontario. “The transformation of the concept of art is only possible when art itself changes its own rules and practices” (www.wochenklausur.at, FAQ, ¶ 32), and with T.C.A. it has.

As long as there is art-making that is respected as art, a transformative goal, and a community that is engaged or who benefit from the work, it can be identified as part of Transformative Community Art practice. In this way we can see that T.C.A. allows for a wide range of practice while still achieving the aim of creating an identity as a distinct field. The recognition of T.C.A. as a category of socio-political and artistic intervention is an important development that will allow us to organize and mobilize ourselves to resist the threats to our practice from funding bodies, cooptation, and institutionalization. Such resistance is important as community art increasingly influences establishment art institutions, invades art galleries which it originally sought to distance itself from, is increasingly incorporated into social services and other social programs offered by the state and private foundations, and is courted and studied by academia.

In developing this thesis, it became apparent that there are numerous issues that are outside its scope, but that would be interesting and fruitful to explore in future work. For example, it would be productive to explore constructions of insider and outsider. Insider and outsider are concepts that are often evoked in the community art discourse.
Some examples of this include community artists seeing themselves as ‘outsiders’ observing society but wanting to bring art ‘inside’ everyday life. Community art is also viewed as an outsider to the establishment art world, yet some community artists are now being embraced inside of this world. In addition, community artists are often outsiders to the communities they are working with or in.\(^7\) Also important to further explore are notions of success and failure. There is a reluctance in the field to talk of failures and yet failure is an important part of learning and experimentation. The impact that funding structures have had on how success and failure are constructed and viewed in the field warrants further examination. What makes a ‘successful’ project successful artistically and socially on T.C.A.’s own terms rather than on funders’ terms? Finally, conceptions of space within T.C.A. provide a rich area for future inquiry. The ways in which T.C.A. can create psychological, social, and physical spaces for change and the possible impacts of these spaces on the ‘outside’ world require further examination. How can T.C.A. create distinct spaces that allow for experimentation and change? What kinds of spaces are conducive to promoting social change? What is the impact of creating microtopias or possible utopias through T.C.A. on those who experience them? And what role can T.C.A. play in creating, maintaining, transforming, and re-inscribing public space?

In addition, for future work it would be productive to mobilize the concept of Transformative Community Art to examine key issues and concepts in the field. Here I will use T.C.A. to examine the relationship between community art and marginality as one example of how the concept may be mobilized to expand the breadth of practice in the field and bring a critical framework to our work. As community art grew out of

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\(^7\) Indeed I found the assumption that community artists always come from outside of the communities that they are working with to be a disturbing one in the literature, suggesting that marginalized communities do not produce artists, or at least artists interested in working with their communities which is clearly not the case. It seems that despite wanting to ‘democratize’ art, much in the community art discourse reveals an attachment to the elitism of the arts.
social activism movements in the 1960’s, community art has an established history of working with marginalized populations. In fact, by defining itself in opposition to establishment art and pursuing a transformative social change agenda, community art has consciously aligned itself with the margins. Working with marginalized communities is not only a common community art practice; it is a normative emphasis that pervades the field. But is work with marginalized populations a necessary condition of transformative community art? Can a transformative community art process be carried out with any population regardless of privilege?

The example I will use to explore the concept of marginality in relation to transformative community art is Toronto’s public space theatre company Clay & Paper Theatre. As mentioned in the introduction, Clay & Paper Theatre has a strong social change agenda; our aim is to change the world. Part of our mission statement reads:

Clay & Paper Theatre produces plays, pageants and parades with the community, grounded in the idea that performance in public space is an act of cultural transformation. Our practice of building, rehearsing, and performing in full public view is an attempt on our part to "bring back the commons," reunite art with the daily life of the community, and to make art accessible to all. (www.clayandpapertheatre.org).

Clay & Paper Theatre operates out of Dufferin Grove Park, a public park where we develop our particular form of multi-disciplinary large-scale narrative theatre using puppetry, bold imagery, original music and poetry, mask work, and stilt-walking. We refer to our form of theatre as ‘thinking in public’; engaging community members in dialogue about the issues facing our communities and exploring creative responses to them. We present stories from the neighbourhoods and cultural communities of Toronto as well as modern day morality tales; plays that comment on both local (i.e., the burying

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78 I have worked at Clay & Paper Theatre since 2007 in a number of roles and am currently the General Manager of the company.
of Garrison Creek, a river that runs under southwestern Toronto, the building of the first outdoor community ovens in Toronto at Dufferin Grove Park) and global issues like climate change, peak oil, and consumerism. Our aim is to “rescue art from its institutional lair and bring it back out onto the streets with the people where it can serve us all” (Clay & Paper Theatre, 2010). 79

As previously mentioned, we attempt to draw as wide a cross-section of the population as possible together for ‘thinking in public’ and work with heterogenous populations. We do this through a range of accessibility initiatives; performing in public space, pay-what-you-can fee structures, providing performances with American Sign Language Interpretation, Touch Tours, Integrated Descriptive Dialogue and Braille and Large Text Programs, and performing theatre out of bike trailers across the city in order to reach new and unsuspecting populations as part of our CYCLOPS: Cycling Oriented Puppet Squad project. Our company views itself as more than the producer of another cultural product; “we are an active member of our community” (Clay & Paper Theatre, 2010).

Clay & Paper Theatre does not however, have a mandate or focus on working specifically with marginalized populations. How can we engage in social transformation without a mandate to work with disenfranchised populations? Clay & Paper engages in transformation in a variety of ways: we actively create, maintain, transform, and re-inscribe public space by building, rehearsing and performing in public space. 80 Our work

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80 By residing in a park and performing almost exclusively in public space, Clay & Paper defends and ‘holds’ public space in a consistent, visible, and creative way. Our constant presence in the park transforms the notion of what a park is and what can be done there. Through our presence in the park since 1994, we have been a key part of the transformation of Dufferin Grove Park in partnership with CELOS and Friends of Dufferin Grove Park. Previously the park was largely abandoned and felt to be ‘dangerous’ by the
attempts to transform social reality by redefining the rules of what can be done in public space.\textsuperscript{81} We transform spaces into places by creating opportunities for strangers to congregate and speak to one another, a phenomenon that usually does not occur outside of the relations of capital (O’Donnell, 2006). We produce art that poses problems, issues, and concerns in abstracted and complex ways and in this manner provide people with a powerful point of departure for reflecting on social and civic issues. This work is done through the creation of our form of large-scale narrative theatre that developed in response to the challenges of outdoor theatre, bicycle-based theatre, and theatre accessible to blind, low-vision, Deaf, deafened and hearing-impaired populations (where accessibility initiatives are part of the aesthetics, rather than ‘add-ons’). The intent is to create opportunities for people to participate in or to help create the changed social reality of the ‘better world that is possible’. In Clay & Paper’s own words:

Clay & Paper aims to reclaim theatre’s position in society as a catalyst for place-making; developing opportunities through theatre for people to come together and participate in each other’s lives. We empower citizens to use their hearts, hands and minds to contribute to something bigger than themselves, to find beauty in their lives and artistic talent within themselves. (Clay & Paper Theatre, 2010)

surrounding neighbourhood. Currently Dufferin Grove Park is a beloved park run with partial community involvement that offers a wide range of services and community programming. Clay & Paper has developed Dufferin Grove Park into a performance venue and now other groups and festivals such as Dusk Dances and Cooking Fire Festival have presented there as well. Artistic Director David Anderson was also instrumental in turning High Park, currently home to CanStage’s ‘The Dream in High Park’, into a performance venue as well, with his previous company Whole Loaf Theatre.

\textsuperscript{81} Clay & Paper reminds people that public space is the commons, a place, and a resource that we collectively share where we can both contribute to our neighbours and also take what we need, as long as we do not negatively impact on others. When we suddenly come across someone doing something unexpected in public space, it can remind us that this is our space too; it can give us a glimpse of a different way of being in the commons. At Clay & Paper we sew our costumes, build our sets, and rehearse our plays in public. Anyone passing by can watch, ask questions, make suggestions or lend a hand if they are so inclined. By the time the play ‘opens’ it has already been seen and experienced by hundreds of people in multiple ways. The theatre’s very existence in the park changes the dynamics of the space; marking the park as an inviting place, a creative space, a vital and energizing space, a place where one can stop and choose to get involved in something larger than themselves, pause to watch the proceedings or walk on by; in other words choose to participate, observe or not-engage according to their desires.
Clearly it is possible to do transformative community art work without exclusively engaging marginalized populations, although ostensibly it would seem counterintuitive to suggest this. The concept of working with marginalized populations in T.C.A. makes sense at certain times and in certain spaces. Clay & Paper Theatre is located in Toronto, one of the most diverse cities in North America, and works out of Dufferin Grove Park, between economically disadvantaged Bloor and Lansdowne and the affluent Annex. The park is centrally located and easily accessible by public transit. It is therefore possible to gather a diverse population together where Clay & Paper Theatre works. In contrast San José, Costa Rica, where Vecinos is located, is almost entirely economically segregated. A play presented in a public park in Sagrada Familia, would not draw a cross-section of the total population, it would draw a marginalized public, some more so or less so but all marginalized. In this context of extreme social, economic, and cultural exclusion, it makes sense to work exclusively with marginalized populations in a social change agenda. Through mobilizing the concept of T.C.A. in an examination of the work of Clay & Paper Theatre we can see that transformative work can be undertaken without a specific mandate to work with marginalized populations, thus expanding the breadth of practice and challenging some of our notions of the nature of community art work.

T.C.A. is a flexible and useful conceptualization through which it is possible to raise questions and examine issues of practice. An exploration of ‘transformation’, ‘community’ and ‘art’ as generative concepts opens up a rich area of inquiry for future work. In terms of transformation we might further ask: How can T.C.A. transform the category of art? And how can T.C.A. transform public space? In relation to the impact of T.C.A. on individual project participants we might investigate the role that T.C.A. can
play in personal transformation and ask: What is the distinction between personal development and personal transformation? And can transformations in the psychic plane translate to transformation in the physical or social planes? In respect to the relationship between T.C.A. projects and the larger social reality we might also explore how and to what extent the transformation of social relations within a project can multiply within a community. How can T.C.A. transform the way in which we experience our social reality? Do ephemeral transformations have long term effects?

In terms of community, still to be pursued are questions such as: What are the roles the community can play in T.C.A.? And how can T.C.A. be involved in building democracy within communities? In considering that ‘community’ is a contested term and that communities are sites of diversity and conflict, we might examine the ways in which T.C.A. can challenge the concept of community as a homogenous pre-constituted entity. In this respect we might ask: How can we represent the diversity of communities through T.C.A.? Can T.C.A. be an effective way to explore conflict in our communities? How is individuality respected and represented in T.C.A. projects? Also in respect to community, the nature of community participation in T.C.A. demands further scrutiny. For example, how do we decide who is included and excluded in T.C.A. projects? What is the meaning and what are the limits of participation and collaboration? And under what circumstances should T.C.A. projects be collaborative, collective and inclusive and when should they be directive, individual and exclusive? Finally, in terms of the community’s role in larger social structures we might further explore the role that local cultural production through transformative community art can play in resisting the homogenizing forces of globalization. How can T.C.A. engage with globalization’s
doctrine of ‘we are all the same’ and its flip-side ‘we are all the same – and you are different’, which leads to intolerance and conflict between communities?

In terms of art, still needing elaboration is the role of art in transformation. In this respect we need further responses to the following questions: What role can T.C.A. play in re-claiming and re-inventing culture? What is the impact on the community at large from the presentation or installation of the artistic products of T.C.A.? And importantly, do social changes explored/experienced/lived in artistic processes translate to change in the ‘real’ world? To expand this question we might ask: does participation in artistically created ‘microtopias’ help us function outside of them? Does it translate into action; that is, into attempts to make that microtopia happen on a larger scale? The developing relationship between transformative community art and establishment art institutions is also a rich site for further inquiry. What does it mean for a movement that developed in opposition to establishment art institutions to use the social capital of art to make positive social change? Can T.C.A. maintain its radical nature in such a situation? As T.C.A. is increasingly taken up in the establishment art world we might consider the ways in which it can challenge the category of art. For example we might ask: are relationships art? Can socio-political relationships be the materials from which art is made? And how important is form in T.C.A.? Transformative community art also raises interesting issues in the area of evaluation and critique. As T.C.A. develops new innovative artistic forms, new criteria for evaluation need to be developed. What are the standards of critique for a T.C.A. project? And how can we include both aesthetic and social dimensions in our evaluation of T.C.A. projects?

As an artistic practice transformative community art raises a number of interesting ethical issues. A central point of contention is who owns the art. How can
issues of authorship be taken up in T.C.A.? Does the desire to retain authorship, to have work seen as art created by a professional artist by the art world, contradict the social improvement mandate of such art? And can a division be made between who owns the content of the story and who owns the representation of that story? The ethical implications of artists using stories from communities that are not their own requires further examination. What does it mean to see people and their stories, communities, and relationships as ‘materials’? What are the boundaries between revealing social ills and objectifying exploitation? How can we ensure that T.C.A. is not just modernist art “with postmodern materials and someone else’s subject matter?” (Miller, 2002, p. 43)

Finally, the role of the artist in community art processes has been the subject of an ongoing lively debate that requires further investigation. Based on Joseph Beuys,82 ‘everyone is an artist’ is oft cited as one of the most important key concepts of community art. Community art participants should see themselves as artists – as painters, actors, writers, sculptors, etc. (Lowe, 2001; Pacific, 1998). However, if everyone is an artist, what distinguishes and identifies the community artist leading and developing the project? While Joseph Beuys made the statement that everyone is an artist in countless forums and contexts, I have found that very few people reference this particular quote: “Every person is an artist. Nevertheless, I do not say: Every person can be Rembrandt.” (http://www.beuys.org/beuys_expanded_art.htm, ¶ 9). The caveat about Rembrandt, gestures toward training, mastery, and specialized skills.83 There is a conflation in the

82 Joseph Beuys was a German artist (sculptor, installation, graphic, and performance artist), art theorist, and pedagogue who believed in the unity of life and art and that creativity is the basis of social transformation. In other words, that shaping social reality is a valid and vital artistic practice. His concept of ‘social sculpture’ refers to human activity that structures and shapes society or the environment using language, thought, action, and object. (www.beuys.org/beuys_expanded_art.htm; www.social-sculpture.org)

83 Indeed in this context there is no doubt that Beuys is making a distinction between the universal creative capacity of all humans that can be activated toward social change, and the mastery of skills to shape materials into form that artists command.
discourse between creative actors (subjects) and artists; a conflict between “the belief in universal creative capacity and the practice of disciplined artistic development” (Lowe 2002, pp 121-122) that still needs to be examined and explicated. There have been attempts to address this issue through terminology, for example, the constructions of the artist-citizen and the citizen-artist (Resonance Creative Consulting, 2006); however important questions around the role of transformative community artists and the role of creative community actors remain. How directive should an artist be in a T.C.A. project? What skills are needed to direct and develop an effective T.C.A. project? And importantly, how can artists empower community members to see themselves as creative, as art-makers, while still maintaining their role as artist?

Transformative Community Art needs to ask these questions. It cannot remain in the realm of ‘feel good concepts’. T.C.A. is a messy and complex process that requires reflection, analysis, theoretical constructs, and critique. It cannot be standardized or homogenized. Mobilizing the concept of Transformative Community Art allows us to move beyond a preoccupation with the binaries of product and process allowing for a more interesting and richer line of questioning. A thorough examination of the terms ‘transformation’, ‘community’ and ‘art’ as they relate to our field of practice thus allows us to examine fundamental issues underlying the discipline, and is a rich area for future work which will contribute to the development of a more complex and nuanced discourse and a more varied yet distinct field of practice. Re-visioning community art as transformative community art integrates a diverse range of practice into a recognizable field and identifies that field as an innovative artistic movement and radical practice for social change.
References


