

History & Theory of Social Art Practice History (Spring 2018)

ARTS 777, Mondays, 2 - 5PM

Klapper Hall room 403 and various locations around NYC

Gregory Sholette: instructor.

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Jeff Kasper visiting instructor

Art as History? Art as Thinking? Art as Research? Art as Work? The aim of this seminar is to survey, critique and historicize the theory and practice of activist, interventionist, public, participatory and community based art that operates within and across fields such as performance, urban studies, environmental science and other socially engaged disciplines. The class will focus on such questions as: Why is it useful, even necessary, to understand the history and theory of social practice art? Where should we look to find the historical roots of social practice art? Are these within the history of art, or external to it, in the broader social sphere? In an increasingly privatized society how do we define and operate within a concept of the public sphere? And how are both mainstream and alternative type cultural institutions responding to the increasing interest in socially engaged art by emerging artists? Through lectures, readings, discussions, student presentations, group activities, guest speakers and off-site visits to galleries and museums we will seek to position socially-engaged visual culture and the shifting role of the artist within an historical, ideological, and critical framework.

Learning Goals & Objectives

- Develop theoretical and historical knowledge of emerging social practice art field.
- Explore and debate complexities, paradoxes and possibilities of socially engaged art.
- Engage in original research related to social practices and individual student projects.
- Foster an environment for investigating cross-disciplinary exchange and critical thinking.
- Acquire working knowledge of seminal texts relevant to this field and in relation to the broader background of art history.

Assignments and Expectations

You will generate at least one question or observation for each week's reading or viewing.

Each student will produce a critical essay (10 pages) that includes an interview with at least 1 stakeholder (artist/organizer/participant) from a contemporary SEA or community based case study exploring, "What does/can the art/artist do in the context of in the making, analysis, and evaluation of socially engaged projects?"

The student is responsible for becoming familiar with the project beforehand and creating a series of 4-6 questions that will frame the interview to be reviewed by the Professor. Who you interview will also be decided in consultation with the Professor.

The final essay describes a) the motivation, intention, and or internal or external force(s) that promoted the project; b) the practical methods the social practice artists uses (Question: How does the artistic/research /engagement methods that we can perceive with our senses, operate, and/or generate or reveal meaning for the viewer/public/participant?) c) Consider the implications the aesthetic interventions have in influencing political or social realities of a given context, event, community, or project. d) Analyze based on a project's goals what metrics the artist/producer/community uses for its evaluation.

Short topic discussion and research update will take place mid semester.

All papers are due at the end of the semester.

THE SYLLABUS

1/29 Week One: Art: + or – Society?

Please begin the first weeks readings before our first class meets:

- [Walter Benjamin - The Author as Producer](#) [re reference to Plato “You will remember how Plato, in his project for a Republic, deals with writers...” see: [PLATO & ART](#) & Plato: Book Ten [Plato X \(selection\)](#)]
- A People’s Art History of the United States by Nicolas Lampert: Chapter’s One, Two, and Nineteen [PAH.Archive](#)

*2/5 Week Two: Art: + or – Society? continued....** Meeting at 2PM SHARP at the Museum of Modern Art MoMA: [The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building at 4 West 54 Street](#) [just west of 5th Ave] We will meet Jennifer Tobias in the Lobby then go to 6th floor. Coats and bags must be placed on the reading table and hands washed. Its a special space!

If weather permits we will reconvene in the MoMA Garden for further discussion or at Trump Tower: [725 5th Avenue Avenue at 57th Street in the Public Garden space downstairs.](#)

SPECIAL EVENT Feb 9 & 10th at the MoMA: Tania Bruguera's Escuela de Arte Util will take place at the museum and they are seeking applications for participants. Details can be found online here: mom.org/arteutil

2/12 NO CLASS: *School is Closed.*

2/20 Week Three: Monday class is on Tuesday this week only.] Meeting with Claire Bishop at the James Gallery on the ground floor of the, [CUNY Graduate Center](#). (365 5th Ave:)

Readings for this week:

Please read these three texts by Claire Bishop for the following class (in 2 weeks)
:Chapter One and Two of *Artificial Hells* (pages 1 to 76): [Bishop](#)"Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" [Claire-Bishop_Antagonism-and-Relational-Aesthetics](#)* Generate at least one question or observation for each of the texts with page numbers/references for the class to refer to and to discuss with Professor Bishop.

2/26 Week Four: Meeting with Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl, Department of Cultural Affairs
31 Chambers Street, NYC, NY [MAP](#)

Reading for this week: introduction to *What We Made*: [Finkelpearl](#)

Also Finkelpearl interviews Mierle Laderman Ukeles:
[Fiinkelpearl_mierle_laderman_ukeles_interview](#)

3/5 Week Five: Meeting at the MoMA with Pablo Helguera.

Reading for next week: Pablo Helguera intro. to *Education for Socially Engaged Art*

3/12 Week Six: TBD

Reading for this week: TBD

3/19 Week Seven: Skype meeting with Grant Kester at Klapper Hall

Reading for this week: introduction to *Conversation Pieces* [Kester](#)

3/26 Week Eight: We combine classes with Mark Read's Arts of Intervention at NYU

Readings/viewings TBD

4/2 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

4/9 Week Nine: COMBINE CLASSES AND MEET A MOMA?

4/16 Week Ten: **SPECIAL LEARNING MODULE with Jeff Kasper: Situating social practice and the ethics of participatory art & research*** More Art will give a presentation about its portfolio of curating/producing/commissioning socially engaged art. [MORE ART 232 East 11th - buzz Floor 1 Between 2nd & 3rd Ave](#)

Readings:

- Caitlin Cahill, Farhana Sultana, et al. "Participatory Ethics: Politics, Practices, Institutions." *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 6, no. 3 (2007): 304–18. [Participatory_Ethics_Politics_Practices](#)
- Rancière, Jacques, and Gregory Elliott. "Chapter 1" and "Chapter 3" in [The emancipated spectator](#). London: Verso. 2009

Suggested Readings:

- Jan Cohen-Cruz. *An Introduction to Community Arts and Activism* (2002).

- Alexis Frasz and Holly Silford. [“Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practices”](#) #artmakingchange, September 2017.

4/23 Week Eleven: A Conversation with Chloë Bass

Meeting at: Old Town Bar 45 East 18 Bet Park & 5th Ave.

Special Assignment for this week (a short exercise):

1. Google "how to guide a conversation."
2. Pick one guide from the first 2 - 3 pages of search results.
3. Follow the guide's steps/tips as precisely as possible in conversation with someone from outside the class.
4. Record the results.

You may repeat this exercise adding specific queries to your initial google search, such as "how to guide a conversation about feminism," or "how to guide a conversation to a shared conclusion."

Reading for this week:

- [Can Abstraction Help Us Understand the Value of Black Lives?](#), Hyperallergic
- [Sorry not sorry](#), Arts.Black
- [What We Don't Know: The Failure of Presumed Understanding](#), The Walker Reader

4/30 Week Twelve: Jeff Kasper MODULE #2: **Case Studies: Cultural Organizing, and Curating Social Practice:** [MORE ART 232 East 11th - buzz Floor 1 Between 2nd & 3rd Ave](#)

*We will visit FAB ([Fourth Arts Block](#)) a few blocks away from More Art at 6 East 4th Street and talk about their work in community arts and cultural organizing.

Readings for this week:

- Paul J. Kuttner. [“What is Cultural Organizing?”](#) 2015.
- Michael G. Birchall, Socially engaged art in the 1990s and beyond [CLICK](#)
- Elizabeth M. Grady. [Process as Form: Response to the ICI Curatorial Convening on Socially Engaged Art](#). Independent Curators International. 2017.

Further Research:

- Natural Occurring Cultural Districts: <https://nocdny.org/>
- Sharon Irish. ["Book Excerpt - Suzanne Lacy: Spaces Between"](#)

5/7 Week Thirteen: Jeff Kasper MODULE #3: Productive Conflicts, Analyzing Relationships, and Other Critical Frameworks for Evaluating Social Practice

Discussion: How do we assess art that is made out of systems and relationships between people, rather than traditional art material? What are the philosophical arguments behind critiques of spectatorship? How have notions such as authorship, passivity, exploitation, productivity, and collaboration changed throughout time and across cultures? What is the relationship between art, public space and democracy? and what are the risks to social practice and participatory methods?

Readings:

- Rosalyn Deutsche, "[Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy](#)," Social Text, Vol. 33, 1992: pp. 34–53.
- Dominic Willson. "[Where Are We and What Time Is It? On Beginning to Curate Suzanne Lacy](#)." A Blade of Grass. 2017.
- Jan Cohen-Cruz. "[The Imagination and Beyond: Toward a Method of Evaluating Socially Engaged Art](#)." Future Imperfect. A Blade of Grass. 2017.

Further Research and Readings

- Mark J. Stern, and Susan C. Seifert. "[Civic engagement and the arts: issues of conceptualization and measurement](#)." University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Policy & Practice, 2009.
- Ernesto Pujol. "[The Cult of Creative Failure](#)" Brooklyn Rail , October 5, 2017.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Thursday May 10 Art as Social Action book launch: [The 8th Floor, Rubin Foundation](#) West 17th Street bet. 5th & 6th Avenues.

Fri, Sat & Sunday May 11 to 13: [Open Engagement at Queens Museum](#)

? Friday, May 18: POSSIBLE VISIT/FOOD WITH WORKERS ART COALITION

5/21 Week Fifteen