

## Ripple Effects: the Work of Art in the World Doris Sommer (Harvard University)

### RESUMEN

El arte obra en el mundo, de manera especialmente productiva cuando entra en colaboración con las disciplinas prácticas, como lo son el derecho, la medicina, y el desarrollo económico.

Su labor es detonar la imaginación para romper con costumbres contraproducentes para ensayar otras maneras de barajar los recursos y las circunstancias existentes. Este ensayo no sólo describe algunas colaboraciones entre el arte y la intervención social, sino que alienta a los lectores a imaginar más colaboraciones dentro de sus propios contextos.

**Palabras clave:** arte, intervención social, imaginación, desarrollo económico

### ABSTRACT

Art Works in the world, especially in alliance with the practical disciplines of law, medicine, and economic development. It works as a trigger for thinking differently and breaking habits that mire societies in stagnant practices. This essay is a description of some existing alliances and also a call for more collaboration between artists and social activists.

**Keywords:** art, social activists, imagination, economic development

# Ripple Effects: the Work of Art in the World

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## Introduction, Stop, Then Go: Making Tracks

*Every experience lives on in further experiences.*  
John Dewey<sup>1</sup>

“Stop!”

Someone from the audience shouts the interruption during a re-run of the tragedy that was just performed about a teenager banished from home because he has AIDS; or a strike busted by armed police; or a child separated from parents at an illegal border crossing. The urgent local issue, scripted and played by non-professionals, concerns both the actors and the audience who come from the same community. And the one-act performance prepares a crucial second act: the repetition that invites spect-actors to interrupt and propose changes, not abstractly in discussion but by acting them out. One by one, the meddlers get up from their seats, step onto the stage, and replace one of the characters to change something in the script and set off a ripple effect in other characters. The actors improvise a new development that may derail the circle of trouble and tragedy onto a tangent, or at least they interfere long enough for the audience to imagine alternative endings. As one spect-actor sits down and another gets up to identify a different moment to stop the action and to take the stage, setting off more improvisations, and so on. The moments of crisis, or turning points where danger meets opportunity, are not given by the play (or determined by historical conditions). They are provoked by ruptures from outside the fatal logic, and they signal the capacity of the will and of judgment to disturb tragedy with clever variations, to twist a disastrous line until the action points away from inevitable catastrophe towards sidetracks into everything from finding treatment for AIDS, to adjusting labor relations, developing psychotherapy, and legislating new laws<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Dewey, John. *Experience & Education*. New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1997 (originally 1938 by Kappa Delta Pi): 27.

<sup>2</sup> George Marcus? Feelings that promote or inhibit agency. See Marshal Ganz essay (in Playdrive pdf.) Boal is ‘organizer’ for Ganz; Boal called the role ‘joker’ But Jacques Rancière questions the entire premise of inter-active theater in “The Emancipated Spectator”. *ArtForum*. 3-2007. “We don’t need to turn spectators into actors. We do need to

This dynamic of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed condenses a range of persistent arts interventions that *Ripple Effects: the Work of Art in the World* will feature, along with their consequences for social practices including aesthetic and political theory. The hybrid interventions follow through from art's first impact into engagements with other fields until the projects achieve advances in human rights and resources<sup>1</sup>. Clever, inspiring, effective, the projects will surely entertain your interest, even under the limitation of short summaries in the next chapters. You are welcome to fast-forward to those chapters or to others that offer ways to think about the agency of arts. Or you can keep company with a reflection—over the next few pages—on why creative agency matters for education and for good government.

I believe that the focus on effective art is still unconventional for teachers of the humanities. It may seem even farther out of bounds for social scientists, and hardly a hint for many civic leaders and policy makers. One desired effect of training a spotlight here is to explore agency as a connector from art-making and interpretation to scholarly fields outside the humanities and to public policy. The connections should make the history and interpretation of the arts—the humanities—irresistibly important for everyone, even if the field had seemed merely decorative or worse than that<sup>2</sup>. Nothing, I trust, will be lost for humanist scholars and teachers, neither aesthetic freedom nor formal rigor; instead, the field may find new allies and recover its significance for civic development. And readers who may have less at stake in aesthetic explorations than do humanists (scholars and teachers of art)—I mean social scientists, civic leaders, parents, advisers, all active citizens—may find net gains from new alliances that reframe social change as persistent mixed-media art projects. The purpose of this book is not the professional opportunism that would compromise objective or disinterested humanist scholarship for a broad appeal; it is rather to make an opportunity for the profession to engage with art's cons-

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acknowledge that every spectator is already an actor in his own story and that every actor is in turn the spectator of the same kind of story". The conclusion follows from research on workers in the 1840s whose leisure time makes them spectators, and therefore equal to privileged citizens. "The chronicle of their leisure entailed a reframing of the very relationship between doing, seeing, and saying. By becoming 'spectators', they overthrew the given distribution of the sensible, which had it that those who work have no time left to stroll and look at random, that the members of a collective body have no time to be 'individuals'. This is what emancipation means: the blurring of the opposition between those who look and those who act".

<sup>1</sup> Jerome Bruner from Ganz essay? Agency told as story. I'm after the formal feature of this story.

<sup>2</sup> Shusterman. *Pragmatist Aesthetics*. A decade ago, the book begins with the same acknowledgment that usefulness seems inimical to artistic freedom.

tructive work in the world.

Art, of course, has no obligation to be constructive, or to be good or bad ethically speaking. And politically, artists can be progressive, regressive, or in between. Communist André Breton and fascist sympathizer Salvador Dalí both identified as Surrealists, along with anarchists and reformists. Not necessarily useful or useless, art is instead provocative, a bit ungovernable, with a loose canon kind of energy that Plato excluded from the Republic. It excites many and varied interpretive approaches, and the choice among them is free for critics, unless extra-artistic considerations interfere. Were the already war-torn world not in urgent need of constructive and restorative interventions, and were explosive tensions not pointing towards more conflict (about race, gender, class, religion, language, borders, water, oil), other equally fascinating approaches might beckon my interpretive companionship away from cultural agents. In happier circumstances, the arts projects featured here would not even have developed, since they respond to apparently incorrigible conditions. But here they are, intrepid projects that interrupt conditions that burden ethics and that irritate artists to stimulate creativity. I invite you to share some of the burden and the excitement, to accompany the brilliant moves that cross and double cross nervous checkpoints between art and everything else.

Like the Surrealist art critics who shared revolutionary ambitions with lead artists of the movement, and like John Dewey's pragmatism that identified democratizing dimensions of art as experience, *Ripple Effects* wants to keep company with exemplary arts projects that create ripple effects in society<sup>1</sup>. Getting close to them, the book hopes on the one hand to offer useful interpretation for current and future cultural agents (meaning all active citizens), and on the other to spike humanist interpretation with provocations from art. Self reflection in admirable arts projects, for instance, should provoke arts interpretation to reflect on its own interventionist work. If humanists ask after art's processes, doesn't it make sense to stay close to artists when they pause to consider their effects on the public, and do the same? Another bolder provocation from art is to imagine change, to risk improvising possible scenarios beyond criticism's standard tasks of description and theorization. Art can coax us to propose adjustments of social scripts by learning, for example, from participatory theater. Actors and audiences discover that crisis is not a stagnant or even a deteriorating

<sup>1</sup> Mary Anne Cawes underlines the dual focus for Surrealists, on imagination as well as conventional politics. It was the reason for Breton's fall out with the Communist Party:

Breton never ceased to emphasize the need for a concurrent revolution of the mind: this was the goal and central focus of the surrealist adventure. His refusal to comply with the subservience expected by the self-proclaimed official revolutionary party was to bring him into direct conflict with that party's minions-at times some of his former closest friends. <http://www.studiocleo.com/librarie/breton/bretonbiography.html>.

condition but rather an unstable cluster of dangers and opportunities set into motion by interrupting a tragic story line. Humanists and allies might consider provoking crises in a range of dysfunctional practices in order to invite alternative proposals. And then, in a self-reflexive pause that keeps company with art, consider how close creativity comes to critical thinking and how this experience of interpretation may affect students, colleagues, general readers.

One (pedagogical/theoretical) effect of calling out a crisis and stimulating designs to intervene is to demonstrate the constructed and artificial nature of social practices. It is to make theory concrete in a hands-on grasp of the profound continuity between art and institutions. Even apparently solid social structures may budge or revive with what Jacques Derrida called a “dangerous supplement” of more art. Supplements are dangerous because adding something to a structure or system shows that it had not been solid or complete, that it is vulnerable to more manipulation. Another desired (social/artistic) effect, of course, would be to develop compelling supplements that will set off ripples toward change. Part of an experiment to facilitate these responses is a course I teach on “Cultural Agents”. It begins with a “Fair” where students meet local artist-activists and pitch problems to each other; then they form collectives to co-design interventions in, for example, the distribution of local produce, or law reform, or racial profiling, date rape, energy conservation, etc. Significantly, humanities inspired adventures like these are in fact restructuring curricula in distinguished business schools<sup>1</sup>. The humanities evidently have important work to do in imagining developments towards democracy, and the field needs friends to help design and to realize those developments. In addition to the fundamental responsibility to educate free-thinking modern subjects by training taste—the faculty of disinterested discernment also known as judgment in the language of ethics and politics (Art and Accountability, Chapter 5)—humanists also develop admiration for art and a corollary care for the world that art constructs and enhances. By extension, I am saying that the work of interpreting art, appreciating its power to shape the world, also has the potential to spur and to support urgent change. This is

<sup>1</sup> See Wallace, Lane. “Multicultural Critical Theory. At B-School?”. *NYT* (Business Section). (Jan 9, 2010). <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/business/10mba.html>.

Learning how to think critically—how to imaginatively frame questions and consider multiple perspectives—has historically been associated with a liberal arts education, not a business school curriculum, so this change represents something of a tectonic shift for business school leaders... ‘What’s different about design thinking is, it’s focused on taking that understanding you have about the world and using that as a set of insights from which to be creative’. Instead of presenting existing problems to analyze or solve, design-thinking classes send students to do something akin to anthropological field work to find the problems. Then they field-test solutions, refining as they go.

is not so much a deviation, from legitimate humanistic attention to the mechanisms of art production and reception, as an exploratory sidetrack from business as usual in ailing disciplines that themselves need support.

Humanists can perhaps apprentice ourselves to artist-interventionists and, in collaboration with other actors outside of art and academics, develop alternative scenarios to the standard story of our own demise. The humanities are not in “crisis”, Frank Donoghue corrects the chorus of complaining colleagues, because that dramaturgic term describes a particular problem and anticipates a heroic restoration of order<sup>1</sup>. The deterioration of humanism is instead a chronic condition, he says, ever since the rise of corporate culture vilified the liberal arts as a drain on social resources. Andrew Carnegie famously denounced traditional college education of the late nineteenth century for wasting time and money to prepare graduates “for life on another planet”. And a little later, in 1909, Richard Teller Crane concluded that no one “who has a taste for literature has the right to be happy” because “the only men entitled to happiness in this world are those who are useful”<sup>2</sup>. The practically structural hostility of business to the humanities had a hiatus from WWI through the Cold War, while ideological battles were defending capital’s future; but by now, corporate culture has recovered its driving “market-sense” and promotes profit in everything, including job-oriented higher education.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever crisis means in squabbles among frustrated professors it remains a descriptive word for existing relationships, not the name for an opportunity to interrupt an inexorable decline. Interpretive criticism hasn’t yet stepped so close to art that it dares to model some of its risky moves, despite the sliding scales of creative value between writing and reading, producing and receiving, that post-structuralism pioneered. During the 1980s and 90s, after all, literary studies deferred distinctions between primary and secondary texts, even privileging interpretation for exposing the self-deception and naïveté of much creative work. Perhaps humanists can now risk a more humble step towards art to learn how to incite a crisis in the drama of decline. It would mean stepping up to the public stage, like Boal’s spect-actors, and trying out a fresh turn (a Cultural Agents Fair, for example) for the currently predictable and depressing performance. Critics could thereby boast their re-invested title by putting a crisis to work<sup>4</sup>. [In

<sup>1</sup> Donoghue, p. 1. For symptomatic expression of crisis, see Robert Scholes’ MLA “Presidential Address 2004: the Humanities in a Posthumanist World”. *PMLA* 120 (May 2005): 724-333. For a popular expression of the ‘crisis’ see Patricia Cohen, In “Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth”. *New York Times* (February 24, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Both quoted in Donoghue, Frank. *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. New York: Fordham University Press (2008): xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Donoghue. *The Last Professors*. P. xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Critic: 1580s, from L. criticus, from Gk. kritikos “able to make judgments”, from krinein

that case, art interpretation would have a strategic advantage over scholarship; but research-oriented humanists needn't raise hackles, because one activity will defend the other. New moves by definition respond to research on older practices and contexts]. From the lift onto an interactive stage, maybe humanists can imagine responding to dismissive corporatism in ways that don't mirror or model the aggressiveness. Fresh responses might cancel the quarantine for failing humanism, a hygienic isolation prescribed both by business and by cautious colleagues to keep inquiry free of pragmatic considerations. Coming out, humanism would have more air, though it be the polluted air of industrial development.

Unwittingly, I think given his bleak prognosis, Donoghue gives clues to a fault-line in humanists' self-defense against utilitarian demands. It is the long-standing commitment to "*preparation for citizenship*" which humanists seldom adduce today<sup>1</sup>. He admits the loss of purpose and blames it on prestige-driven competition as jobs become scarcer and part-time professionals replace tenured professors. But Donoghue's reasoning skips a beat without redirecting the narrative. Inspired by industry, competition may indeed determine the intense pitch of scholarly activity, as he says; but why would it eliminate civic purpose? Does increased professionalization necessarily forego professional commitments? Doctors, and lawyers and engineers still compete through purposeful delivery of services. If civic purpose hasn't survived the pressure to publish, if purpose hasn't generated research agendas that earn academic capital, it is worth asking why. Could the reason be a fundamental apprehension about purposeful goals because they seem to constitute obstacles to the liberty in liberal education? Cornered by corporatism, humanists worry—understandably—that even noble missions capitulate to the logic of utility. Missions tether inputs of artistic and critical freedom to outputs of political responsibility. Alongside that worry *Ripple Effects* recognizes the danger of reducing admiration for art to computing its practical effects; but the book also acknowledges aesthetic accomplishments of social change artists who begin from stories of despair (like terminally defensive humanism) and take tangents that lead elsewhere. Maybe these artists can inspire more academic movement past the standoff between usefulness and humanism, to join colleagues who are already asking ticklish questions<sup>2</sup>.

When critical companionship can identify shared characteristics of effective arts projects, the humanities will point to at least two improvisations that may have the side effect of suspending the story of its demise:

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"to separate, decide" (see crisis). Online Etymology Dictionary: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=critic>

<sup>1</sup> Donoghue. xviii. My emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, Bidy. "Do the Humanities Need to be Useful?". Cornell University.

One improvisation is an excursus into the underdeveloped area of arts interpretation that reunites aesthetics with politics; another is the wager that offering descriptions and generating basic principles of existing projects may be useful to a range of artists and civic leaders as they reflect on new moves to make. In both cases—developing aesthetics and supporting new projects—interpretive contributions (interference?) can thicken humanist work with renewed civic purpose.

Art criticism hasn't yet tracked formal features of activist art, maybe because the stakes have seemed purely political and therefore allegedly unfriendly to formalism<sup>1</sup>. Currently, criticism is likely either to celebrate or to denigrate activism for its ideological intentions and investments. Yet mentors such as Mikhail Bakhtin can inspire a reconnection of politics with formal or genre analysis, just to mention one still popular model for literary critics (rather than mentioning the controversial Lucaks)<sup>2</sup>. Ideology is embedded in literary form for Bakhtin: For example the linear episodic formal connector (“and then”) of nation-building epics about an aristocratic hero contrasts with the modern novel's leveling of conflicting values and interests in the “meanwhile” of interlocking plots<sup>3</sup>. Today, formalist criticism can develop new distinctions: between art that produces an aesthetic provocation as a final effect, and art that moves like rhizomes or networks beginning with an artistic provocation, fanning out into related practices, and finally affecting institutions and social practices<sup>4</sup>. This for-

<sup>1</sup> Showalter, though Lukacs and Bakhtin showed the connections.

<sup>2</sup> Lucaks, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel* (originally Cassirer, P. Berlin: 1920; MIT Press, 1971) develops a similar distinction between epic and novel to the one Bakhtin rehearsed a generation later. <http://books.google.com/books?id=Qa75D2dtiz0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=lucaks+theory+of+the+novel&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false>

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin, M. M. “Discourse in the Novel”. *The Dialogic Imagination*. p. 259. where monophonic lyric poetry stands in for Stalinism and the loose form of novels becomes a vehicle for free will and conflict. Rancière takes up changes in genre as political shifts. See *ArtForum* 3 (2007): 254. <http://books.google.com/books?id=JKZztqxqIpgC&pg=PP1&dq=bakhtin+dialogic+imagination&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false>

<sup>4</sup> Burnham, Linda Frye. *High Performance 25* (Spring 1984). “The Artist as Activist”, an introduction to Part II: The Artist as Activist section of “The Citizen Artist”. It begins:

Ideologies can usually be found at the crux of activist art—both ideologies that artists hold dear and ideologies that artists seek to change—so an awareness of the construction of ideology can be essential to the activist artist's work. We begin our section on the artist as activist with Adrian Piper's 1981 essay ‘Ideology, Confrontation and Political Self-Awareness’, in which she puts forward an understanding of how ideologies are developed and maintained, and how the activist artist can recognize and address”. Later on, commenting on the surge of Chicano art, she makes no formal distinction between the activism of Guillermo Gómez Peña's performances and Luis Valdés's *Teatro campesino* that helped to organize the United Farm Workers Union. them. [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/artist\\_as\\_activ.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/artist_as_activ.php).

formal contribution would concern both art criticism and politics by identifying a family resemblance or generic quality among socially effective arts that otherwise are vastly different: Interruptive theater that moves from staged conflict to psychotherapy and legislation; poster-plastering campaigns that accelerate medical research and expand human rights; pantomime artists who make the public laugh at jaywalkers and reduce traffic deaths; muralists who reclaim public space; paper picker publishers who popularize elite books and form cooperatives; vegetable gardens on the roofs of the South Bronx. What do these and many other agents of change have in common?<sup>1</sup>

One intriguing formal feature is the ripple or rhizomatic movement of art into extra-artistic areas to develop hybrids that demand expanded sets of skills and expertise. Another corollary feature is the function of art as catalyst, ice-breaker or call to crisis, which sets off social initiatives or gives them a start. Art is not enough, some will say, when the objective is social change. I am sure this is true; but without art and imagination, how does change begin? How is something new and counter-factual conceivable in the first place, or compelling on the bottom line? “Ultimately it is artistry that makes the point and cuts across the barriers to understanding”, Luis Valdez reflects after developing *Teatro Campesino* to build the United Farm Worker’s Union. “There is a certain quality of excellence that we have discovered over the years, that a lot of people assumed that we didn’t have to have, you know? They assumed that we could be rough and untutored and primitive, and still maintain our charm”<sup>2</sup>.

Whether we start with grass roots collectives of painters and performers who relentlessly remind a city that indifference to AIDS comes down to complicity with the plague, or whether the beginning is top down with a mayor who stages entertaining interruptions of murderous traffic violations, artful *maestros* lead the way from arts interventions toward openings in politics, and/or education, medicine, law, labor, urban development... The tracks start with a stop, to syncopate the rhythm of everyday life, to produce a break, estrangement, which is the formalists’ name for the aesthetic effect that art provokes. This break in the rhythm of normal, and also in ritual and performance, is when “the flash of the spirit” can emerge from the drone of predictability and stir art and religion, to follow Robert Farris Thompson on African and African-diaspora cultures. The pause is the point, as if rhythm were established in order to syncopate and conjure the spirit<sup>3</sup>. In medical language, “syncope” means a fainting spell, a blackout or temporary death.

<sup>1</sup> For Sustainable South Bronx, see their website and also Douglass Rushkoff, pp. 234-39.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/el\\_teatro\\_campe.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/el_teatro_campe.php)

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983. I am grateful to J. Lorand Matory for referring me to Thompson’s book.

Catherine Clément used this physiological term for rupture to name a shudder in philosophical thought that sets off sequels once the thinker comes to and reads the interrupted pattern from a distance, almost posthumously.<sup>1</sup> Philosophers (like priests, scientists, and civic leaders) will continue to think beyond the breaking point, adjusting their vision to the experience of cognitive failure or exploring new routes that the break revealed.

Artists and audiences do that too, sometimes. That's when art promises most sincerely to make social change, though of course neither the creators nor their clients are bound to follow through from a first aesthetic effect to address the social or psychological target it uncovered. In practice, ending an art project with an aesthetic shock effect and not pressing towards fault-lines can either incite a public to imagine future interventions—as national novels do when romances end badly for lovers who come from conflicting sectors<sup>2</sup>—or it can amount to fitting social safety valves onto existing institutions—the way that tragedy worked in ancient Greece. For Boal, Aristotle's *Poetics* is the classic manual for socially disabling art. He calls it “coercive”, because Aristotle's version of tragedy acknowledges unfairness and then dissuades the public from doing anything about it. A hero's headstrong freedom excites the public's desires; but when disastrous consequences on stage spare the excited audience, it gasps with release from rebelliousness and forfeits the freedom to imagine society beyond bad endings. More often than not, artists will practice this “symbolic aggression” perhaps intending to incite change, but not holding out for extra-artistic results even when artists care about issues beyond potential markets in an increasingly professionalized circuit of academies, production and consumption.<sup>3</sup> Radical contestation of existing relationships doesn't have to change them in any practical way, but rather to expose social obstacles to desire, or to expose art itself as one more symptom of determining structures. (Adorno is the favorite spokesperson both for the intolerance of real art for corrupt systems, and for a systemic despair of popular arts and their pretensions to be free)<sup>4</sup>. But the binary radical views that either pitch art in the camp of revolution or pit art against the struggle miss an impressive range of reformist creative practices that aim, by stages, to enhance participation and provision. Reformism (including Gramsci's cultural road to revolution) is, you see, more ambitious in a paradoxical way.

Serious art wrests freedom—for a while at least—from natural and

<sup>1</sup> Clément, Catherine. *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*. Minnesota University Press, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> See Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. University of California Press, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Mirra raised this development of circuits of academies, production and art fairs.

<sup>4</sup> Adorno is the most compelling spokesperson on this systemic despair and art's feeble pretensions to exercise freedom.

social constraints, humanists may generally agree. But in the service of society, art becomes instrumental and therefore unworthy of the name for many scholars and defenders of the arts. Binary positions on art in politics have been disincentives to think beyond exhausted debates about points of contact and collision between personal creativity and public projects. Art has either been praised—and blamed by activists—for its freedom from politics, or it has been damned for feeding into a political machine. But to press the point about the dangers of engagement, there may be a useful distinction we can make between alternative approaches to political art, at least between their alternative effects. [In any case, while it is wresting freedom from social constraints art can hardly claim to be disinterested. Instead, disinterest is better understood as an effect of artistic intervention, when reception is caught off guard by a poem or a play or music, disoriented and dislodged from habit in ways that enable free judgment and provoke interpretation].

Instrumentalism in the arts no doubt deserves its bad name when it supports repressive regimes with compliant images and words, and when it insists on vanguard hierarchies of a leader and the followers who mustn't stray onto political sidelines. (Boal made Aristotle the apologist for vanguards of the left and the right)<sup>1</sup>. Can the same objections apply, though, when the arts activate civic participation and divergent interpretations? The effect of political freedom through art is indirect, Friedrich Schiller proposed during the confrontations of the French Revolution, not ideological but participatory when citizens experience art's effect of "disconnecting" them from habit. Emancipation follows from this aesthetic effect, "getting out of the ordinary ways of sensory experience"<sup>2</sup>. Feeling that freedom is a first moment; its ripples incite citizens to pursue future moments as fellow artists who syncopate received ideas in order to introduce adjustments or alternatives. [A similarly indirect effect of arts education stimulates the economy and should placate corporate concerns about humanist "uselessness." I mention the "creative economy" argument not to justify art with pragmatism, but to suggest how deeply the art-making faculty is bound to all manner of productivity<sup>3</sup>. Instead of grand-standing the

<sup>1</sup> Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*. Obviously follows Arnold Hauser. See also Thompson *Aeschylus in Athens*.

<sup>2</sup> "Art is going elsewhere. And politics has to catch it.: An interview with Jacques Rancière" with Sudeep Dasgupta, *Krisis*, 2008. Issue 1. <http://www.krisis.eu/content/2008-1/2008-1-09-dasgupta.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Richard Florida et al. See also Wallace, Lane. "Multicultural Critical Theory. At B-School?" And community artist Aida Mancillas: "Despite a national climate that characterizes the arts as either superfluous or dangerous, on a local level, communities like North Park are using the arts as an important tool for everything from alternative recreation for youth, to the formation of neighborhood identity markers, economic deve-

superiority of one —aesthetic or commercial— value over the other, humanism can connect the dots and continue to defend “purposelessness” as the disinterested pleasure in art, an initiation to the sense of freedom, without denying freedom’s ultimate effects on political and economic creativity]<sup>1</sup>.

John Dewey anticipated the distinction between coercive and liberating political art when, through his philosophy of education, he added a caveat to his celebration of art as an intense experience available to everyone:<sup>2</sup> “The quality of experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. The first is obvious and easy to judge. The effect of an experience is not borne on its face”<sup>3</sup>. Experience can be crippling if it satisfies desire and leaves people passive. “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience”<sup>4</sup>. [Art can also be downright destructive when exclusive interests fan vicious desires, even in democracies]<sup>5</sup>. But when art stimulates desire for more experience of wonder by sending ripples of critique and creativity through the public, it develops resilient democracy citizen by citizen<sup>6</sup>. Enervating

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tourism, safe streets and much more. Community artists are viewed as creative problem-solvers, unfettered by a particular methodology, who can help communities resolve issues that seem intractable.” [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/citizen\\_artist\\_1.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/citizen_artist_1.php)

<sup>1</sup> Donoghue, 88, participates in the inflexible posture he critiques.

The imperative to be practical, efficient, and profitable, which I have traced as a strong influence on past and present versions of academia, will be an even stronger force in the future... Our only hope might be to persuade students to look more skeptically upon the promises of college as job training. This will be a tough sell.

<sup>2</sup> Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*.

<sup>3</sup> Dewey, John. *Experience & Education*. New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1997 (originally 1938 by Kappa Delta Pi): 27. Dewey’s emphasis on effect.

<sup>4</sup> Dewey, *Experience*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Racist art in Europe and US; India’s anti-Muslim movements.

<sup>6</sup> John Dewey, satisfaction...

The relationship between Dewey’s philosophy on art and the process of values clarification is made explicit in John Raths, Merrill Harmin and Sydney Simon —the precursors of the theory of values clarification. They reference Dewey’s ideas on *art as experience* as a point of departure: ‘We started, of course, with the thinking of Dewey, and his belief that humans can reflect about values issues as well as other issues, and that they gain the most from their value-related experience when they do so.’ (Louis E. Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sydney Simon. *VALUES AND TEACHING*. 2ND Ed. (Charles E. Merrill Pub. Co., Columbus OH 1978) at p. 286) They continue and make explicit the connection between experience and values, though curiously they omit the work that art does to connect sense with value. (Abarca, Marco., Aula Verde, *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2010).

or thoughtless instrumentalism is one thing; and energizing interventions are another. The democratizing difference derives more, I want to speculate with Dewey and Rancière, from the numbers of creative and divergent artist/participants than from the particular ideas or issues that ignite engaged art, though ideas and shared basic values matter too. “The common power is the power of the equality of intelligences”, Rancière writes. “This power binds individuals together to the very extent that it keeps them apart from each other; it is the power each of us possesses in equal measure to make our own way in the world”<sup>1</sup>. Without divergence, then, numbers can add up to a harmonization that avoids risk and that blunts both politics and art.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the distinction between coercive (vanguard) and emancipating (broad-based) art is a difference of form more than content. Together with two more formal features already mentioned (the extra-artistic connections and calling a chronic condition into crisis) numbers of artists help to sketch a profile of family resemblances among exemplary cultural agents.

Art, meaning interruption and innovation, is the name for social resources that we are just beginning to theorize from stunning examples and in ways that join humanists, scientists, social scientists, and civic leaders in necessary collaborations for a fast changing world. When art chooses to follow through from the aesthetic effect provoked by a creative act (let’s say, from the horror of a tragic finale for Oedipus), it identifies a challenge in related activities that the defamiliarization brought into focus (Maybe Oedipus could counsel Creon on the dangers of political intransigence). Then, perhaps, the new move leads to another interruption (Might the conversation between Creon and Oedipus extend to involve Antigone as they re-interpret familial obligations?), which may point to further socially-constructed obstacles that set off more creative interventions. The discursively nomadic projects developed by Boal, Mayor Mockus, ACT UP, *Teatro Campesino*, and many other cultural agents share, as I said, the formal property of migrating from one field to another: they move along tangents on “a thousand plateaus”, taking leads from one practice to provoke responses in others, and go on from there to more connections<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Rancière, Jacques. “The Emancipated Spectator”. *ArtForum* 3, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Rancière vs. harmonization or consensual rule, see *Disagreement* (1998), and throughout his work. Claire Bishop frames the problem for art in her provocative *ArtForum* article, “The Social Turn”. (February 2006):

Artists are increasingly judged by their working process — the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration... Accusations of mastery and egocentrism are leveled at artists who work with participants to realize a project instead of allowing it to emerge through consensual collaboration.

<sup>3</sup> See Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, 1987. The term describes the interlocking maps of human practices.

## Why Go?

For several reasons, these resourceful and relentless projects deserve the attention of scholars, supporters, and political decision makers, though it would be enough justification to feature the rhizomatic form if it did no more than encourage new artists to pursue the aesthetic consequences of their work until it too achieves concrete results. Inside the academy though, humanists and social scientists have good reason to consider projects that cross the line between art and civic effects, especially humanists who notice defensiveness in our field and want to recover some expanse through civic purpose. The reasons extend to skeptics who question the value of the humanities and wonder why the tradition of arts interpretation should continue to matter in education and in public life:

1) The first reason is that ripples, or rhizomes, make good on the *transformative* promise of art, by pursuing a process from a first aesthetic effect through subsequent interruptions of collective practices that expand the number of participants as they achieve social change. Transformation doesn't often happen suddenly, on art's first impact; the change is cumulative in stages that are worth tracking. But punctual gestures can develop into great waves, Robert F. Kennedy famously said about interruptions of South African apartheid. (It is good to remember this now, as lives are on the line against tyranny in Iran)<sup>1</sup>. "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance"<sup>2</sup>. Not all of the ripples were artistic interventions —though some of the most compelling anti-apartheid actions certainly were— unless you stretch the meaning of art as Dewey did to include any activity performed with skill and with the intensity that freely invested energy allows<sup>3</sup>. When humanists assert that art has the power to transform people, they can substantiate the claim through ripple effects that add up to social results, though collective transformation depends on individual changes of heart, one by one, provoked by art. (See Chapter 3, "Schiller and Company") Even doubters about humanism's value should appreciate sensitive analyses that track artistic provocation and show results in palpable change as well as in useful formulations of principles for social development.

2) These sequenced and collaborative projects publicly stage crea-

<sup>1</sup> I thank Michael Fisher for this reminder.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Ariel Dorfman for this lead. See: <http://www.rfksa.org/contents/overview.php>; Une 6, 1966, University of Capetown.

<sup>3</sup> South African anti-apartheid art. Athol Fugard, etc.

tive/critical *judgment* every time an artistic inspiration takes a turn onto one tangent among the range of possible moves. [Private creativity doesn't have to publicly show its seams or display its decision making process]. Judgment, or taste, is a faculty that humanists train in the normal course of aesthetic education. It is of a different order from reason. Instead of differentiating correct argument from error, judgment distinguishes persuasive or successful attempts at art-making, world-making, from aesthetic failure. For centuries, humanist training in judgment/taste has been a staple of civic development. We can take real political credit for cultivating this rule-free faculty on which rules depend, because democracy thrives or fails on the exercise of judgment. (See Chapter 5, "Art and Accountability"). Historians will remind me that the Ur-educator of aesthetics, Friedrich Schiller, was a favorite in Nazi classrooms where ideologues enlisted him to extol Germany as master and model for the world<sup>1</sup>. But ideological misreading shouldn't dismiss the maestro. Marxist Marcuse knew that, so does deliberative Habermas<sup>2</sup>. And for Dewey's pragmatist ethics, Schiller's realm of possible "appearances" where compositions are imagined before they are made is the space for "dramatic rehearsals" of possible actions, in direct debt to Schiller, the dramatist of ethical dilemmas<sup>3</sup>. He is a teaching artist still worthy of inter-active disciples. Schiller knew how to sidestep ideologies of either/or, rational abstractions and sensual lawlessness, to enable both. Like other artists who risk the wrestle with ideas into words or clay, or like a hostess in the 18th century salons who mixed people from different classes and fostered modernity, or a seminar leader who incites students to talk, the founding artist educator welcomed conflict and doubt

<sup>1</sup> See for example a furious Paul de Man, "Kant and Schiller". *Aesthetic Ideology* (ed. and intro. Andrzej Warminski). Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press (1996): 129-162.

<sup>2</sup> Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization*; for Habermas, see chapter 3. and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987).

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*:

Deliberation is a dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action... [It] is an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible action are really like... Thought runs ahead and foresees outcomes, and thereby avoids having to await the instruction of actual failure and disaster. An act overtly tried out is irrevocable; its consequences cannot be blotted out. An act tried out in imagination is not final or fatal. It is retrievable. Quoted in Fesmire, Steven. *John Dewey and moral imagination: pragmatism in ethics*. Indiana UP. P. 69.

Schiller's concept of Schein is precisely this imaginative deliberation/experimentation before the artist decides how to mold material. Fesmire understands, or intuits, the link between this imaginative improvisation in ethics with the improvisation in art: "As in a game of chess or a jazz quintet, the more refined one's imagination (a function of relevant habits), the richer the fund of germane possibilities and the more reliable one's valuations". P. 71. I am grateful to Kay Kaufman Shelemay for pointing me towards Dewey's "rehearsals."

as incentives to create, recognizing failure as part of the creative process.

3) Persistent projects —that morph along the ripples that they put into motion— refresh an appreciation for the capacity of human *agency* and for the inexplicably resilient will to intervene where existing structures seem to determine a social stasis. For two generations now, much of our best scholarly efforts in the humanities and social sciences have been dedicated to demonstrating the inevitable self-perpetuation of structures. When post-structuralism revealed ironies about the inconsistent or self-defeating terms that somehow support durable systems of thought and practice, it reinforced the conclusion of stasis with a refined and world-weary skepticism about the pretention of any declared purpose or possibility to intervene. Despite the reasonable pessimism of the Cold War period and its neo-liberal aftermath, a tireless will to intervene is practically the signature of much art of the same period. This unrepentant naïveté forces open some windows and doors of an elite academic edifice onto vast under-represented populations who cannot easily afford conformity and who bend theory to their will<sup>1</sup>. (See Chapter 4 “Gramsci Takes in Weber”)

4. Artistic interventions therefore revive Gramsci’s dedication to political change through a cultural war of position that can advance strategically from one trench to the next despite the apparently insurmountable odds, for example in Fascist Italy. The projects remember his and Schiller’s proposals for aesthetic education where active *citizens are artists* who pursue political freedom through the free exercise of imagination that can entertain divergent positions and make up new arrangements of social and material elements. Schiller wrote his 1794 *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in response to the Terror in France. The incentive was political but the answer was art, more art and experimentation for everyone. In this recoverable civic project, art is not instrumental in the narrow sense but rather a quality of free engagement with everyday practices whereby citizens hone personal independence in the context of collective life. Later, John Dewey would offer art therapy to a democracy that teetered from Depression but could recover its civic energy through broad-based creativity. Thinking active citizenship as art-making is an inspiration to re-think political dynamics as fueled by creativity. A purely rational approach to politics will miss the moments of artistic interruption; and yet without creativity and counter-factual speculation change is literally unthinkable. Social scientists and most public officers are reluctant to call either quotidian or spectacular political creativity by its common name. But the classics had no difficulty naming politics as art, and Jacques Rancière comes close; it is the supreme art that requires all available skills and judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Rancière, Jacques. *Aesthetics of Politics: Distribution of the Sensible*.

## Risky and Risk-Averse

Debates about how to define art set contemporary creators and curators on edge, but not most academics. Too simply put I am sure, one side argues that art is distinguished from everydayness by particular inherent features, and finds some supporters in analytical philosophy who try to draw the line<sup>1</sup>. The other side defends art as an experience that can derive from any human activity, to which pragmatism lends its anti-elitist voice<sup>2</sup>. At stake evidently is the (political) difference between valorizing privileged genius and appreciating a common denominator of creativity. On both sides, critics stay inside a field called art; but *Ripple Effects* wanders beyond the field, hoping to use its terms to describe creative attributes of extra-artistic projects. In some ways, this is a gambit to enlist neighboring fields in reflections on art, because some measure of art —estrangement and intervention— is at work in any dynamic process; it's the spark of innovation. And recognizing that spark may garner support for art that defends aesthetic freedom by featuring it to full advantage, and also for interpreters who make connections between art and other inspired projects.

In another way, tracing the continuity between art and medicine, law, politics, education, economics, may have a truce to offer to critics in conflict about the validity of the word “art” to designate politically driven works, if these might be better appreciated as social movements<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps we should concede that these projects make such significant concessions to politics that they do not stand as works of art, but still derive some of their power through their link to art. In one case, art is a free-standing substantive; in another, it's an attribute of a hybrid form. Can we consider differences in the scope of aesthetic freedom, between unfettered works of art and those that venture to negotiate political pressures? Derrida considered a similarly flexible way to acknowledge the paradox of ethics in the real world. Ethics is an incommensurable responsibility (he was reading Lévinas); but to be effective rather than implacable “non-negotiable” ethics is nonetheless obliged to consider and concede to some pragmatic demands.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, defenders of aesthetic freedom in art might allow that some pro-

<sup>1</sup> Short list from José.

<sup>2</sup> Dewey and followers, Shusterman, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the debate between in *Artforum* (February 2006) between Claire Bishop and Grant Kester. Bishop's critical assessment of “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents” raised Kester's objections to her “policing” of the border between art and activism, and then her concern about uncritical populism. (For sequels, “Leisure Arts” blog <http://leisurearts.blogspot.com/2006/05/grant-kester-artforum-claire-bishop.html>).

<sup>4</sup> See Derrida, Jacques. *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness: Thinking in Action*. London: Routledge, 2001. I thank Luigi Patruno for this lead. In:

projects display artistic elements and also link onto other practices to promote social change. On the other side, apologists for social efficacy might admit that disinterested freedom is a foundation of even the most useful arts.

These disagreements connect to the 1960s conflict of New York Conceptualists, who refused to pander to an impure public that couldn't or wouldn't let go of unreasonable subjectivity, contra Fluxus and the Pop Art refuseniks who abandoned objective Concepts for the naughty plagiarism that poached high and low as it cruised between galleries and groceries<sup>1</sup>. Lately "relational aesthetics" revisits the controversy about art as thing vs. art as experience, to claim that art's highest aim is to create relationships. Relational art values interaction with the public over lonely artistic virtuosity, and sometimes has nothing material to show from an exhibit once the dinner plates are cleared and the gallery without people becomes just empty space<sup>2</sup>. Hothouse arguments about what art is and does may haunt or drive historically inflected scholarship, but academics tend to stay clear of risky resolutions. Schiller would surely have stayed clear of the art wars too, though he'd press the links between art and politics.

Humanists more often detour around the question of art's essence and celebrate its freedom from the mire of interests. A corollary to this detour around meaning has been that we don't generally question the nature of our own work while we exercise the freedom the work allows, unlike some artists who do question themselves. "But how do we verify, following Rancière, the efficacy of our practice?" artist Paul Chan asks, "perhaps a confrontation is in order. That is to say, the place to verify the practice of equality in the pursuit of a form of freedom (which seems to me like a pleasing if wonky definition of art) might well be a confrontation with a force of order that divides and partitions"<sup>3</sup>. This type of reflection doesn't stop social scientists either (or politicians and entrepreneurs) when they engage art; instead, they may typically use art to illustrate points they already know, rather than ask what scientists do. (Isn't any scientist a kind of artist whose fresh intuitions interrupt tired patterns with an arresting syncope?)<sup>4</sup>.

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[http://books.google.com/books?id=eZ650H24LIAC&dq=On+cosmopolitanism+and+for+giveness%22+Derrida&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=RfAwS7yjCNPZIAe5qp2dBw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=eZ650H24LIAC&dq=On+cosmopolitanism+and+for+giveness%22+Derrida&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=RfAwS7yjCNPZIAe5qp2dBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

<sup>1</sup> Harrison, Charles & Wood, Paul (Eds.). *ART in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Blackwell Publishing: Malden MA, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Another mention with references appears in *Art and Accountability*, Chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Chan, Paul. "Fearful Symmetry". *ArtForum* 3, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Randy's suggestion that Renato Rosaldo's anthropology does the same 'ahá' as art. Robert Austin's What managers need to know from Artists; the creative economy. David Edwards, *ArtScience*.

Yet the elective affinities between scholarship and art-making deserve to be pursued, not only because the arts are finally being recognized for developing cognitive capacity in students<sup>1</sup>, but also because making art is a model of reflexive practice, or praxis. Art dares to make a difference in the material at hand and then to test the effects of the experiment through the ripples of public reception. Both art and scholarship work in rhythms that syncopate between activity and intuition, risk and judgment, to pull projects forward.

When artists reflect on what they do to materials and in the world, scholars may find the reflexive gesture familiar from their practice of critical thinking about other people's work. Scholarship can also stop alongside self-reflexive artists to ask after its own essence and effects<sup>2</sup>. Concerns about ethics and aesthetics would then broaden to consider the results of criticism itself, including formalist criticism. Though effects are admittedly hard to track and tracking can only be partial, it is worth asking after the ripples that follow from writing and teaching in one (radical, reformist, pessimist, apolitical) way or another, through some questions (of form, content, institutional constraints, practical results) or others. Not that anyone should pursue tendentious or deliberately misleading scholarship, even if good intentions drive them, but that tendencies are already imbedded in unexamined approaches and these can produce tendentious effects. If scholarship and interpretation seem a bit behind the self-reflexive practices of contemporary art, might the flap at the edge of the frayed envelope of art's definitions also be an invitation for humanists to rethink what art criticism is and does in the world?<sup>3</sup>. Pedagogy can pause if it has fallen out of step with its engaged object of study, in order to consider teaching's social connections and consequences. The syncopate between artists and teaching scholars might then be a start—in both senses of shock and beginning—of a renewed centrality for the humanities.

I noticed a while ago that Julio Cortázar's best readers reach many of his same observations, but very slowly, as if his short stories were slow-release drugs timed to produce a delayed kick in the seats of his humbled admirers<sup>4</sup>. Since then I've gotten used to the pausing pace of academic responses to art, and I even enjoy it; the extended effort to catch up is its own reward, as Russian formalism showed, because engagements last longer that way.<sup>5</sup> But we've probably given ourselves enough time to notice

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Harvard's art task force; new program in Universidad Tadeo... etc.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Gallop, for example, does this in *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, Public Planet Books, 1997. What kind of feminist would be accused of sexual harassment? Jane Gallop asks (p. 1). She firmly rejects the line between intellectual and sexual engagements (p. 12).

<sup>3</sup> Harvard University's recent Task Force on the Arts concurs.

<sup>4</sup> "Playing to Lose," a paper I presented at Montclair State College in 1978 (?).

<sup>5</sup> Examples of critics not "getting it" right away; e.g. Dada, or conceptual art, etc, for Alexis

the migrations, the continued cleverness, and the impact, of socially transformative art; and we can catch up by tracking some exemplary successes to make their patterns visible for students of art and for creators of more rhizomes. Art “objects” as moving targets have outrun much formal scholarship, no doubt because art keeps running, while formalist interpretation has stayed more or less put. It’s not that interpretation fails to notice the interdisciplinarity of arts projects; the contemporary field of cultural studies is a strong response to this multi-dimensionality. It’s rather that formal approaches remain focused on first aesthetic effects, though they could advance cultural theory (and politics) by describing art’s ripple effects. Not surprisingly, maestros can lead the way for scholarship. Romance languages know that *maestro* (or *maitre*) means schoolteacher as much as it means master craftsman or creative artist<sup>1</sup>. Pedro Reyes made the connection clear to me during his show “*ad usum: to be used*”, explaining that pedagogy is part of many artists’ interactive installations; they tempt and teach visitors to play enabling games.

Serious play for humanists can be a reprieve from pessimism and also relief from a peculiar anxiety about risking professional credibility or being wrong. Scientists and artists don’t worry quite so much about mistakes; they expect to make them in the course of experiments that can fail and thereby open gaps in current thinking to explore new forms and questions. Of course humanists are more cautious, not only those who defer civic responsibility but also those who assume it, since humanism doesn’t mold

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See [http://library.pratt.edu/conceptual\\_art\\_biblio.pdf](http://library.pratt.edu/conceptual_art_biblio.pdf) on Conceptual art, p. 4 on *Fluxus* erasing difference between art and everydayness, especially through humor. Fluxus was antiestablishment and desired to breakdown the distinction between art and the everyday. Unlike the Performance, Conceptual, Happenings, Action, Environments and Installation Art, which took a more serious and monolithic approach to the act of art, Fluxus artists hoped to transcend.” And p. 10:

Fluxus implies a flow or change, more a state of mind than a style. Social goals assumed primacy over aesthetic ones. The main aim was to upset the bourgeois routines of art and life. Early Fluxus events-guerilla theatre, street spectacles, electronic music concerts-were aggressive demonstrations of libidinal energy and anarchy generally associated with the 1960s. Mixed media was the Fluxus format. Numerous art forms were simultaneously and cacophonously deployed at events that sometimes resembled contemporaneous action or later happenings; though they tended to be more humorous and open minded. Fluxus activity was not limited to live events. Mail art utilized the mail as a distribution system.

the aura of seriousness surrounding art by emphasizing humor.

<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, *maestro* is the possibly limiting masculine form of a noun that can also appear in the feminine: *maestra*, which doesn’t suggest “artist”. I propose a use in the gender-neutral spirit whereby, for example, *poeta* refers to both men and women, and in English the way that “actor” now identifies all genders in performance.

material but cultivates human minds in order to develop good taste and care for the world. Yet caution and care can harden into brittle postures if they don't risk self-reflection. And on reflection, an unyielding defense of art's autonomy is a rearguard position from which to watch fewer students enroll in humanities courses, whole departments vanish, and dwindling support in both moral and economic senses. A bolder stand would invite the world in.

Humanists are in fact venturing out more, even more than the decades-long venture beyond traditional literature and art studies to develop gender, ethnic, and post colonial studies, often to represent under-represented constituencies and, in the best cases, to register formal features that generate shared theory of social asymmetry<sup>1</sup>. [Like interpretation, the best cases of activist art also play to mixed ethnic and gendered audiences, Luis Valdez notes from experience with the *Teatro campesino*: "We have to respond to the whole audience, the whole country. You are protected against your own racism and narrow-mindedness, and are urged, due to the make-up of that audience and the need to reach them, to reach a higher place"<sup>2</sup>]. Now, humanists increasingly establish outreach activities through Public Humanities programs and they expand scholarly commitments to address newly urgent issues such as climate change and human rights during post-Cold War globalization<sup>3</sup>. With important exceptions, however, civic responsibility tends to pull people in one direction while art pulls in another<sup>4</sup>. "The idea that politics and aesthetics do some of the same work will be jarring to those of us schooled in a much simpler and more rigid division of labor between the two"<sup>5</sup>. Social efficacy is a criterion for community engagement, not a goal for exercising aesthetic theory to describe art's effects<sup>6</sup>. Not yet. A tenaciously safeguarded realm of art interpretation sur-

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Eve Sedgwick's work drives a wedge through a formal feature, e.g. a triangle of sexism and homophobia, "Beteween Men," and achieves a general critique of hierarchy. Tj. Clark?

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/el\\_teatro\\_campe.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/el_teatro_campe.php).

<sup>3</sup> See Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI). Current President Srinivas Aravamudan has been promoting several engaged points of focus; climate change is the most popular.

<sup>4</sup> Courses such as "resist" "Protest Literature" Gates' formal approach in Gates Jr., Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: University Press, 1988, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Kristin Ross, commenting on Rancière. *ArtForum*. (March 2007-03-27): 254.

<sup>6</sup> Cawes:

Why should surrealism have expended so much energy in trying to situate itself in relationship to communism when it seems that anarchism was its natural ally? That is precisely the question Breton was still asking himself "twenty-five years later," as he confessed in "The Tower of Light," published in *Le Libertaire* in 1952. No doubt, he answers, because of the lure of 'effectiveness.'

survives where purposefully impractical values and pleasures resist the push of brute power and the pull of markets. Teachers of literature and other arts can get almost allergic reactions to talk of art's public ambitions and its effects on social relationships<sup>1</sup>. Relationality puts art's autonomy at risk, some humanists will say. They have a point. But riskiness is one of art's signatures, one that it shares with the daring political experiment called democracy which today arouses so much resistance and hatred<sup>2</sup>. I wonder whether "art criticism" isn't an oxymoron that juxtaposes art's taste for recklessness alongside risk-averse humanities. Maybe the contradiction runs parallel to a scandal that Jacques Rancière points out in the term "political philosophy", where the first word describes disagreement and the second signals harmony<sup>3</sup>. Yet the tension that he identified at the turn of the millennium, between inspired divergence and judicious convergence, has been good for art and may be good for theory too; it sets off a productive rhythm of stop and go in persistent projects. After a first effect, the rhizome projects pause to consider the next intervention, like the advances that Gramsci described from one trench of cultural agency to another. Art criticism can now track those daring moves through unanticipated turns in order to describe the dynamics of aesthetic practices that double for political strategies.

However the debate settles among curators and art critics about the originality or critical purchase of "relational aesthetics", the concept names a goal of much contemporary art, and it can trigger interpretations that link art to social dynamics. More, much more, than most parts of the world, the Americas know that culture and society are not given legacies but made, made up. The invention of tradition is no news here; it's a hemispheric pastime. Where European languages can still honor correct behavior, *comme il faut*, and *como Dios manda*, American languages make do, *haciendo de tripas corazón*. It is hardly a stretch to connect this quotidian creativity to instruction in and about resourcefulness. Especially today, the language developed by participatory or relational art engages the public in new or newly framed activities, the way that creative teachers engage students. Setting the theme and conditions for a course that students will help to

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Fish's articles.

<sup>2</sup> See Rancière, Jacques. *The Hatred of Democracy*. London: Verso, 2007. He explains how the principle of popular rule arouses fear and hatred of democracy in today's ruling classes, and also how forcibly exporting "democracy" breeds hatred abroad. "Throughout, Rancière draws on his earlier distinctions between the police and politics in *On the Shores of Politics* (1995)—between, on one hand, control-oriented and regulatory State institutions and, on the other, the universal space of civil society". From <http://www.britannica.com/bps/additionalcontent/18/26480521/The-Ontology-of-Democracy>.

<sup>3</sup> See Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1998).

develop is a bit like preparing participation through an artwork that invites public creativity<sup>1</sup>. To talk about teaching need not be self-serving for academics, if the talk links onto responsibility for adding value to art when it ripples through the academy in sidelines from exhibitions and performances.

## All Aboard!

John Dewey didn't worry much about the tensions and contradictions that Rancière points out, or about a conflict between practical and artistic work. He purposely confused the distinction as he educated citizen/artists for democratic resilience<sup>2</sup>. ("Every citizen is an artist," Boal confirmed)<sup>3</sup>. What's the essential difference for Dewey between a painting and an academic essay? It is basically the medium the artist uses<sup>4</sup>. He mixed his metaphors about art as experience when he insisted that aesthetics named a normal buzz of pleasure derived from any work well done in everyday time. Dewey's point paradoxically depends on the disinterested time-stopping effect that aesthetics distinguishes, despite his objections, as a break from everydayness<sup>5</sup>. If capitalism separated the spheres of art and work, it

<sup>1</sup> Among many examples that you can surely add, I think of Wodicko and the lines of alliance and collaboration through obstacle courses that he follows through with each public projection on monuments; and also of Harlem-based Maestro Tim Rollins whose KAOS kids come from the Bronx school he taught at and show in art fairs and galleries. Brazilian photographer Paula Trope does her best work when she trains young *faveleros* until they become darlings of art dealers. Trope's students made it to the Venice Biennale. Either we can conclude from her experience that Trope is not really an artist because her own pictures don't sell, or we can observe that her most developed art is teaching. (I thank Nicolau Sevcenko for suggesting this question.) Perhaps you will say that Rollins' and Reyes' double dealing in one field and the other is uncommon. But the two tiered careers other *maestros* who have worked with Cultural Agents (including Augusto Boal, Alfredo Jaar, Antonio Martorell, Anaida Hernández, Betsabé Romero, Roberto Jacoby) and many others suggest a profound and structural interdependence between art (which makes habits seem strange and shows the seams of its own construction) and education (which does similar work). You may also think of Paolo Freire's interactive *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) alongside Augusto Boal's lessons for spect-actors in *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979).

<sup>2</sup> Activists understand the artist to be an active citizen; but the proposal here is the more general inverse: to appreciate the active citizen as artist. See *The Citizen Artist: 20 Years of Art in the Public Arena*. An Anthology from *High Performance Magazine* 1978-1998. Edited by Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland. Also [http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/citizen\\_artist\\_all2/index.php](http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/citizen_artist_all2/index.php).

<sup>3</sup> Boal, Augusto. *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. (Translated by Adrian Jackson). London, New York: Routledge (2006): 39. he continues: "...all are capable of developing an aesthetic process which enriches themselves" (p. 39).

<sup>4</sup> Dewey. *Art as experience* 15?

<sup>5</sup> ThankstoCarrieLambertBeattyforherconcernsintheCulturalAgents'LudicReadingCircle.

also generated the language of aesthetic effect that Dewey pirates beyond the gates of high culture. He raises a standard of engagement to rally a public that knew only mummified museum art and therefore remained out of touch with the pleasures and the dignity of fully human life. By now Dewey's art essay goes almost unseen but for the few pragmatist disciples who rankle at the dismissive analytic establishment of philosophy<sup>1</sup>.

There's nothing wrong with mixing metaphors and methodologies to describe the amphibious and contingent life of art<sup>2</sup>. The overlapping spheres of quotidian life and artistic intervention describe the space of an "aesthetic regime" of art, as Jacques Rancière calls it<sup>3</sup>. Close to but apparently unaware of Dewey's democratizing assault on exclusive preciousness, and in direct debt to Schiller's first and "unsurpassable manifesto" for the "fundamental identity of opposites" meaning art's special but general quality, Rancière identifies and promotes a leveling aesthetic regime that generates a critical distance from almost any practice. Aesthetic distance exposes the fungible artifice that had passed for stable content in the "ethical regime" and for solid forms in the "poetic or representative regime"<sup>4</sup>. "The aesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres. Yet it does so by destroying the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making, a barrier that separated its rules from the order of social occupations"<sup>5</sup>. From today's long historical view of "natural" languages and political be-longings, of race and sexuality, almost everything

<sup>1</sup> See Jackson, Philip W. *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press (1998): xii. Thanks to José Falconi for reminding me of Richard Rorty. See also Shusterman, .3: "Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934)... is hardly studied today, let alone regarded as a promising source for future aesthetic theory." But Buchloh stands alongside Dewey, the pragmatist aesthetician, without noticing him, rueful that critics like himself no longer command the cultural capital to mentor politically risky artists. See Buchloh, xxxii.

For Dewey's importance during first half of 20th century, and his demise under pressures of efficiency during last half see Levinson, M. *The civic achievement gap*. Washington, DC: CIRCLE, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Dewey, John. *Art as Experience* 137; 229 quoted in Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992: 16.

<sup>3</sup> Claire Bishop calls on Rancière's appreciation for contradiction in aesthetics to draw the line between arts interventions and simply social interventions: "For Rancière, the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative process". "The Social Turn"

<sup>4</sup> Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* translated with Introduction by Gabriel Rockhill, afterword by Slavoj Žižek. London, New York: Continuum, 2004 (La Fabrique-Éditions, 2000): 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics* Pp. 23. The passage continues:

human describes hybrid and precarious forms; even one's identity, as Benjamin Buchloh says, becomes an open work<sup>1</sup>.

For politically engaged readers of *Ripple Effects*, the links between broad based creativity and active citizenship may find familiar grounding. For other readers who bristle at the boundaries between art and accountability, zealous to keep at least art free from instrumental purpose, I'll beg some indulgence and invite you to continue until, perhaps, the historical connections between humanism and public life, or the renewed possibility of central billing for arts and interpretation, or the fascinating nomadic projects, may persuade a change of heart. In the least case an indulgent reading may lead to the pointed objections and recommendations that contribute to debate. One question that will come up is whether civic education depends on an innate creative play drive, as Schiller argued while new republics struggled through trial and error. Or whether artistic creativity is a faculty of the talented few, as Kant thought, whereas judgment is universal? Another question asks about the consequences of acknowledging that secular society is consciously man-made and artificial. Does it mean that art is an architect and manager of social structures (such as the U.S. Constitution); or does art forfeit freedom when it manages social effects?<sup>2</sup> When art blows the whistle on abuse or indifference, does the "Stop!" announce a reformist wedge into a fault-line, or a radical call for revolution? And why, but also when, did art and interpretation tend to retreat from public life in economically advanced societies? Notice that I haven't asked why all existing systems must fail (Marx, ??), or how interventions just make things worse (Adorno, De Man), or ways in which social change is an illusion so that the best we can do is to cleverly get by (de Certeau, Žižek). These questions stay at the stops. They look self-defeating for agents of change like Boal, Mockus, Rama, and many others who consider despair to be a failure of the imagination<sup>3</sup>. Gramsci might have added that the

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The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself. Schiller's *aesthetic state*, which is this regime's first *manifesto* (and remains, in a sense, unsurpassable), clearly indicates this fundamental identity of opposites. The aesthetic state is a pure instance of suspension, a moment when form is experienced for itself. Moreover it is the moment of the formation and education of a specific type of humanity.

An apparently independent but similar position, deriving from Dewey is George J. Leonard's *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

<sup>1</sup> Buchloh, xviii.

<sup>2</sup> See Slauter, Eric. *The Constitution as a work of art*.

<sup>3</sup> Fesmire, Steven. *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics*. India-

end of optimism is a kind of death in life. The accomplishments of the arts projects considered here show that pessimism is indeed necessary to investigate failures, but as an ultimate horizon it isn't always realistic.

In what follows, "Press Here" features relentless grass roots projects that "melt-up" from the sparks of a particular art intervention to ignite large scale social effects, as in the works of Boal, ACT UP, and the Pro-Test Lab<sup>1</sup>. Then, "From the Top" presents arts projects inspired by high ranking political leaders, including Antanas Mockus, Edi Rama, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, that extend to broad bases of artist-citizens. Three theoretical chapters follow to describe a developing, and welcoming, scholarly field of cultural agency marked by the points of contact between aesthetic and political innovation: "Schiller and Company" makes a link between aesthetic education and contemporary political theory through the debt of Habermas —political guide for many compelling interlocutors— to Schiller; "Gramsci Takes in Weber" claims Gramsci as the patron saint for ripple effects, because his unstoppable optimism of the will survived his pessimism of reason and held out for stages of cultural change that swell to make a revolution; and "Art and Accountability" gives a backward glance to reconnect humanists to civic education through the link of taste/judgment. The book ends with "Classroom Cartonera", a personal account of drawing on theories and practices of several cultural agents to make my own intervention as a lay "artist" or teacher of a literacy program that explores classic texts through visual and performing re-interpretations. A side effect of the program has been to improve my graduate school lessons in literary theory. But the guiding intuition is that promoting broad-based critical literacy —still a solid indicator for levels of violence, poverty, and disease— will set off good ripple effects through underserved but artistically activated young citizens.

na UP (2003): 24-25:

A tendency toward rivalry or even aggressiveness may, for instance, be part of our shared primate inheritance, but, as James urges in 'The Moral Equivalent of War,' this would not entail the inevitability of class systems or wars as the sole possible cultural configurations of these impulses... In other examples, Freud, who agreed with James about diverting aggressive tendencies, nonetheless argues in *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and its Discontents* that civilization emanates from the Oedipal complex. And Nietzsche at times explains the growth of civilization, in individuals, and even the growth of Nature itself in terms of the will-to-power. More generally, it is a mistake, Dewey insists, 'to make some one constituent of human nature the source of motivation of action... Marx's impulsion for economic security and Michel Foucault's concept of power are related examples of such reductionism.

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, *How the World Became a Corporation and How to take it Back* (Random House, 2009). "The Melt-Up" is his title for Chapter 9. P. 227. <http://books.google.com/books?id=i5azMsQJkz8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=%E2%80%99CLife,+Inc%E2%80%99D+Douglas+Rushkoff&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false>.

The chapters cannot hope to answer the questions for democracy and social development that I mentioned, or other important questions that I hope you will add, though I make bold to pose a few as invitations to investigate past my personal limits. Please consider these pages to be a work in progress that with your help can develop understanding and promote the constructive work of art in the world, including the work of aesthetic education. It remains open to your criticism and contributions, including nominations of exemplary cultural agents who should gain visibility as models and mentors. This is a “Beta” or experimental version of the project, sent out for commentary and criticism before a mature version can develop, as Boal said of his experiment with *Legislative Theater*<sup>1</sup>. So he asked readers to send in critical and constructive responses to his postal address. Following his lead, once again, I invite you to send suggestions for *Ripple Effects* by email to Cultural Agents, [cultagen@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:cultagen@fas.harvard.edu).

And now, if you want to fast forward to some issues in this book and to delay or skip others, you can press ahead selectively as Boal instructed his readers to do, though that menu has obviously changed to this one:

- For English, stay tuned; para español presione a un traductor.
- if you want, bottom up interventions, press 1
- if you want, top down creativity, press 2
- if you want, aesthetic education, press 3
- if you want, cultural revolution, press 4
- if you want, useful humanism, press 5
- if you want, to do something practical, press 6
- if you want, to talk to the operator, press [dsommer@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:dsommer@fas.harvard.edu)

In all cases, press here, wherever, because the lines will ultimately connect, but keep pressing.

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<sup>1</sup> Boal, Augusto. *Legislative Theater: Using performance to make politics*. London: Routledge (1998): xiii. “After your first reading, send your impressions, comments, suggestions, additions, propositions, desires to: Augusto Boal, Rua Francisco Otaviano, 185/41, CEP 22080-040, Ipanema-Arpoador, Rio de Janeiro RJ, Brazil”.