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SoFA Journal Issue 4: Exchange

Portland State University Art and Social Practice

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EXCHANGE

FASTRACK



RECYCLE MAIL

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The Social Forms of Art (SoFA) Journal is a bi-annual publication dedicated to supporting, documenting, and contextualizing socially engaged art and its related fields and disciplines. Each issue of the Journal focuses on a different theme in order to take a deep look at the ways in which artists are engaging with communities, institutions, and the public. The Journal seeks to support writing and web based projects that offer documentation, critique, commentary and context for a field that is active and expanding.

The SoFA Journal is published in print and PDF form twice a year, in Spring and Winter terms by the PSU Art & Social Practice Program. In addition to the print publication, the Journal hosts an online platform for ongoing projects.

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Letter from the Editor

The fourth installment of the Social Forms of Art Journal focuses on the theme of exchange. How does knowledge, wealth, capital, emotion, and history (among other things) transfer from one person to another? How does exchange function in everyday life? How are artists using exchange in their practices? Rather than showcasing various “exchanges” between disciplines, or people, or communities, we wanted to look at the functionality of exchange itself. The focus of this issue is not so much what gets exchanged, but the mechanisms of transfer that enable it. To this end, we brought together a collection of research and writing that utilize different forms of exchange.

This issue looks at various ways in which local, generational, and non-institutional forms of knowledge get exchanged: conversation, oral history, online message boards, and zines are all decentralized ways that information gets distributed, in resistance to centralized ways of learning such as universities and textbooks. Emily Fitzgerald’s ongoing intergenerational collaborations build visibility and highlight the knowledge and connections of seniors to their communities, and create connections to youth and artists through workshops, video, photography, and installation. Emma Duehr explores the connections that plant propagating can make between family members. Zeph Fishlyn documents their project Medicine Exchange, which looks at everyday personal forms of caretaking and healing that people enact in their lives. And Shelbie Loomis reflects on living in an RV Park, examining the various protocols and knowledge one needs to live a nomadic life.

Issue 4 also investigates the technological and economic means through which ex-

change takes place. Aurora Rodriguez analyzes and documents *el paquete* (the packet), a way of sharing and disseminating digital content (movies, music, TV shows, Youtube videos, books, and games), via an embodied network of door-to-door services in Cuba. Roshani Thakore and David Wilson put together excerpts from their ongoing correspondence, all taking place through physical “snail mail.” A.K. Burns talks about artist economies and the founding of W.A.G.E., an activist platform advocating for the transparent and equitable payment of artists. Rebecca Copper looks at the ways in which cultural capital is exchanged, and the psychological perspective on transactional relationships. Cassie Thornton offers commentary on the many facets of her ongoing project, the Feminist Economics Department, and its interventions in the Bay Area and internationally that highlight and critique gentrification and the role of tech money. Finally, artist Alex Borgen presents a meditative account of their experience in medical school, reconciling the interrelation of the artist and the scientist.

This collection of writing, taken as a whole, shows the variety and expansiveness of exchange within a narrow contemporary context, that of the North America, and particularly the United States. The writings challenge the assumption that exchange is an inherently capitalist function, and many of the authors show ways in which it can function as more than a means of exploitation. Exchange allows us to interact and know the world around us—it is a tool we all use everyday, and a field in which artists are experimenting and creating new forms of meaning and experience.

—Spencer Byrne-Seres
Editor

Hayden Island RV Park Exchange Subculture:

Shelbie Loomis

When my partner Charles and I moved onto Hayden Island, we first met our neighbors when they came outside to watch as we backed up our forty-foot, twelve-thousand-pound payload into a narrow hook-up spot which would be our home for the foreseeable future. After a few tries, and feeling the pressure of being watched I could feel myself become irritated with being such a spectacle. “I see you have a dog with you. What type of dog is he? He looks like a pit bull.” The woman called out as I performed my practiced landing signals to my partner. I could tell Charles was getting agitated with my neglect, and as I was standing there implementing my last task for the day, I was too. I gave her a short answer and turned my attention back to the task at hand. “I can tell you don’t want to talk right now,” she retorted and quickly went back inside to give us some space. Later on, I mentally kicked myself for being so short. After all, I knew the protocol for new arrivals and knew how important it was to have open communication with your neighbors. The RV (Recreational Vehicle) community is a complicated fabric of individuals who are reliant on exchange to survive, to grow and to thrive through alliance. And I knew that if I wanted

my family to be supported in a time of need, it was necessary to be hospitable.

Exchange to Survive.

Before venturing out of the Southwestern desert to travel across the United States to the Pacific Northwest, I had done my share of research about the lifestyle of living in an RV full time and possible boondocking. It was an easy fix to the rising high rent housing market in Portland and an easy financial solution while attending graduate school. I watched the videos, read articles, fantasized about the whimsical tiny house living that came with intriguing people that traveled a lot. I thought about Marina Abramovic and Ulay who lived in their Citroën police van from the late 1970s into the 1980s and according to the Guggenheim had cultivated a “lifestyle choice that merged with their belief that freeing the mind and spirit was only possible after physical deprivation”. To me, I felt that this lifestyle could provide a much needed break away from consumerism and capitalism while I focused on what freed my mind and spirit.

When asking for advice from people that were a part of the RV community while still in

New Mexico, I realized that the most important information to know were all things that came with word of mouth. Things like “when should I empty my black-water tanks out?” or “which navigation routes should I take that don’t have the steepest slope highways?” It became apparent that if we got on the road and wanted to successfully navigate through the country as nomadic citizens who embraced physical deprivation, we had better learn how to ask for help from the people that knew best.

The chance to exchange information, trade knowledge, use of specialized tools, or learning how to work on “rigs” began to re-contextualize simple actions, ideas and objects from everyday life on the road into a form of performance. A survival performance that came with a collaborative audience, should one be open to the folks that abide by the law of hospitality. For example, while on the road, Charles and I were taught what to do when the hitch would seize up preventing us from detaching (Cortez, NM), or the act of pouring over driving details to mitigate construction (Provo, Utah), or being coaching how to drive through areas such as McKenzie Pass in Oregon (Mountain Home, Idaho). People would offer to lend their tools

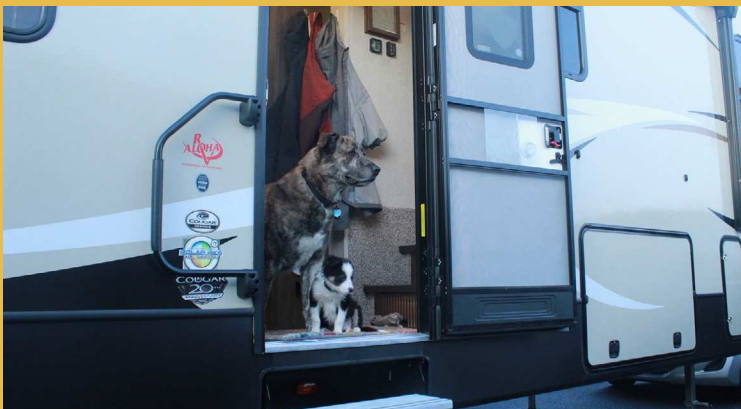


Fig. 1: (left) Dogs in Cougar RV, 2019. Photograph: Shelbie Loomis. Fig. 2: (right) With Ulay in the Citroën van, 1977-1978. Photograph: courtesy of Marina Abramović Archives © Marina Abramović and Ulay. DACS 2016

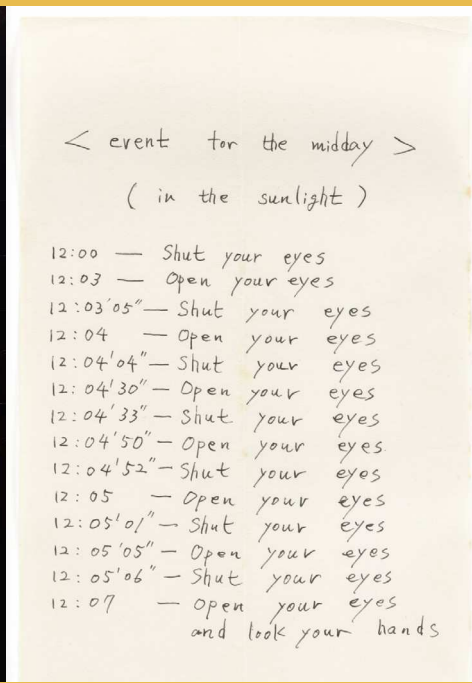
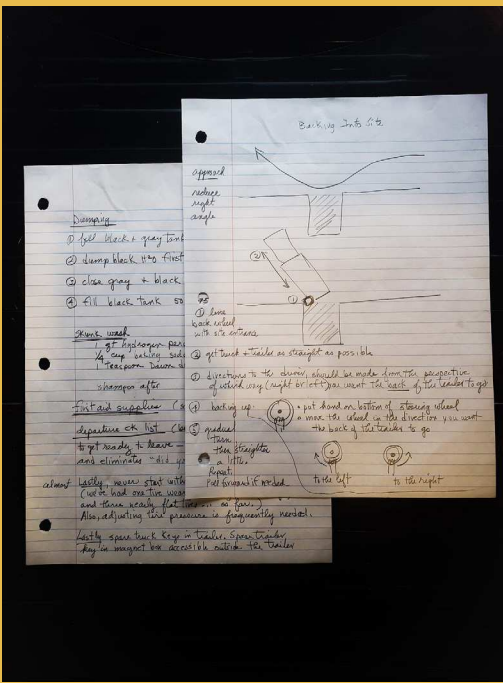


Fig 3. (left) Letters from Lyn. 2019. Ink on Paper. 8.5 x 11" Fig 4. (right) Mieko Shiomi. Event for the Midday (In the Sunlight). 1963. Event Score. Ink on paper, 4 9/16 x 7 (11.5 x 17.8 cm)

like a holding tank flush wand, heated water hoses, extension cords, rakes, etc, just for the sake of being helpful. A way of paying forward. The exchange culture allows for creative and useful DIY storage craftsmanship, how to cook inside and outside the RV, and where to take your dogs on a walk. All trade is freely given and taken. It felt like people (veterans, truck drivers, mechanics, union workers, retirees, etc) were quick to lend their knowledge, skills, and getting a little dirty with no special thanks and the distribution of the knowledge was accessed by open conversation. Simply because we were all in transition and times were difficult.

I began to request some of the exchanges to be given in unexpected forms of communication—written or recorded in the moment. Some of the correspondence resembled Fluxus event scores, instructional by nature, which made me think of works such as <Event for the Midday> (In the Sunlight) by Mieko Shiomi. (See Fig 4) When

I asked Lynn, an experienced RV driver in their 70s, to take something that felt intuitive and place it down on paper, they took the time to act out the action and close their eyes to picture the event as if it were happening in front of them. Shut eyes. Open eyes. Shut eyes. Turn the wheel. I could only imagine that this was how Shiomi was able to produce the Fluxus event scores, in real-time as they looked at their hands.

Exchange to Grow.

Through my inquiry and deeper conversations with my neighbors, I asked questions such as why they felt the need to have such an open forum of communication, shared resources, and knowledge? The reactions and explanations were full of economic downfall, personal and family illness, and a series of unfortunate events that led them to be placed in these circumstances. However, I was surprised when conver-

sations led to comparisons to the lives they used to live and aspirations to enter back into a sedentary house. It was completely contrary to what I had assumed when I asked if they had any advice to novice RV-goers like myself. I could see their facial expression change as they entertained the thoughts on how to reintegrate into stable housing. "It's a hard life... living in an RV. It's alright for a small period of time, but it's another way of keeping you stuck. I don't recommend it. I have spent more money on maintenance than what my RV is worth," said Robert (left), my neighbor during an interview in front of his RV. And at that moment, I could understand what he was alluding to. Mostly, everyone who lives in the park no longer considers themselves as "passing through" and are on their charted paths to bettering their futures or upkeeping the ones they already have. For Robert, who owned an RV towing business, he had outgrown his RV since the birth of his daughter and looked forward to the day that he did not have to spend the time or money maintaining it; the lifestyle was producing a negative feedback loop. But at that moment, I was shocked by my oversimplified assumptions. "Growth" has a different meaning for different people. My neighbors (right) who preferred not to be named, described a life of traveling, adventure, and chasing rodeo culture before the crash of 2008 which landed them in the RV park for twelve years and on their second RV. They wanted to continue to



Fig 5. (right) Robert with RV. 2019. Photograph by Shelbie Loomis. Fig 6. (left) Neighbors with RV. 2019. Photograph by Shelbie Loomis.

travel but decided to take a job to help grow their savings account and give them access to healthcare. They gestured to the front garden and deck stairs (which they traded with a neighbor for) which made their experience feel more like the home they used to have, and we spent the time talking about the tree that they fought to save that now blocked the exit if they decided to depart. The narratives were real, complex and raw. The exchange allowed for the residents to push past surviving and into growing within their environment, circumstances, and contrary to public opinion, within society.

Exchange To Thrive.

My social practice became a means to reconcile my own usefulness to my RV community but also an avenue to navigate the underpinning economic struggles. During my first semester attending Portland State University, I was prompted through the History of Social Practice course taught by Ariana Jacob to research the project, then to ultimately think of a socially engaged project that could be interesting and engaging with a tertiary audience. Even as I continue to work inwardly on the complexities of the Hayden Island RV Park subculture and my research. It was the first time I questioned outwardly

towards a secondary/tertiary audience what empathy and involvement they could participate in. How could people relate? Do people have assumptions just as I did about living in an RV? How could I merge these two communities through action? My first impulse was exploring the physical restrictions of operating in an RV, to give my audience a basic understanding of how it felt.

Since story-telling was at the root of every exchange, *RV Living & Cooking: Social Practice Exercise* (Fig 7) encouraged participants to take a virtual reality tour of my rig and tasked them to complete a family meal within the confines of simple lines marked on the floor. The participants had to collaboratively fabricate dinner for virtual guests who were coming over and the challenge of seating everyone somewhere within the RV. I wanted imagination to take hold of my participants as they carried on the familiarity of playing house, but ultimately humanizing the experience of the RV community's reality. When the experiment was over, I reflected on what was necessary to thrive. It was important to begin to challenge social stigmas around the experience so that a connection could be built between two subgroups of people. This project allowed me to reconsider how art and social practice could bridge the gap and create a larger community built on empathy. I began to consider what it meant

to have an exchange built on thriving and an inclusionary future.

Through this journey, I have bonded with my new community through art and open dialogue, watched the ebbs and flow of exchange that flourishes naturally to create a co-existence of tolerance and sustainability within individuals, a community and in society as a whole. It is an organic and imperfect process however by changing my lifestyle by living with Hayden Island Recreational Vehicle Park Residence; my mind and spirit have been freed.



Fig 7. (above) Virtue Reality of the Cougar 366RDS. 2019. Screenshot by Rebecca Copper. Fig 8. (left) RV Living & Cooking: Social Practice Exercise. 2019. Screenshot by Rebecca Copper. Fig 9. (right) Justin Maxon drinking an imaginary beverage. 2019. Screenshot by Rebecca Copper.



Medicine Exchange

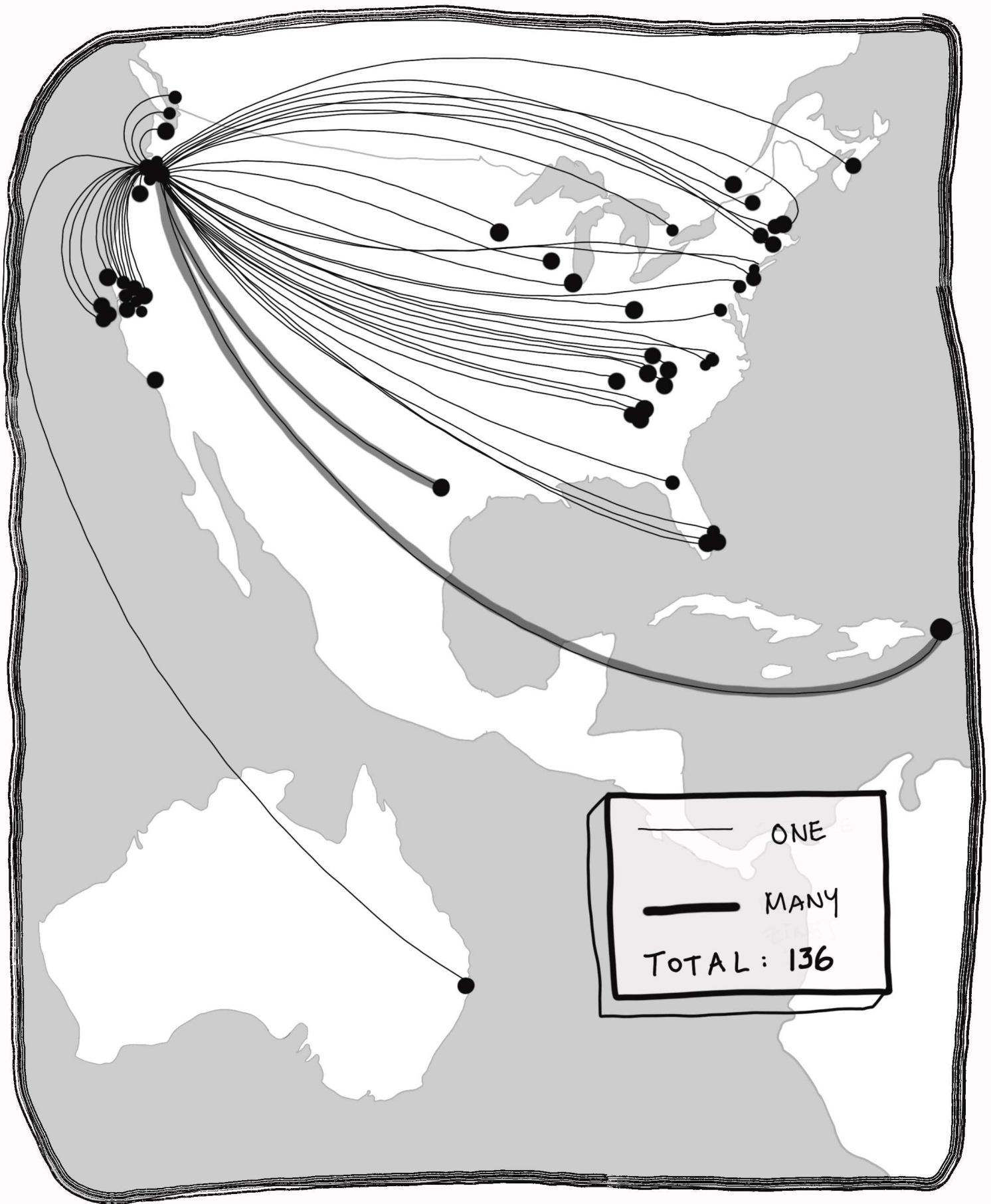
Zeph Fishlyn

Medicine Exchange started as a simple, tiny one-page zine project: I wanted to share a few different ways I was coping with grief stemming from a series of difficult events in my personal life. When I posted it on social media, I had a sudden flood of requests from friends and friends-of-friends-of-friends for printed copies. They wanted them for themselves, they wanted them to gift to friends of theirs who were going through hard times. One person in Puerto Rico wanted a bunch to share with his community of queer and trans people struggling in the wake of Hurricane Maria. Another in Atlanta wanted to pass it around as part of her organizing work.

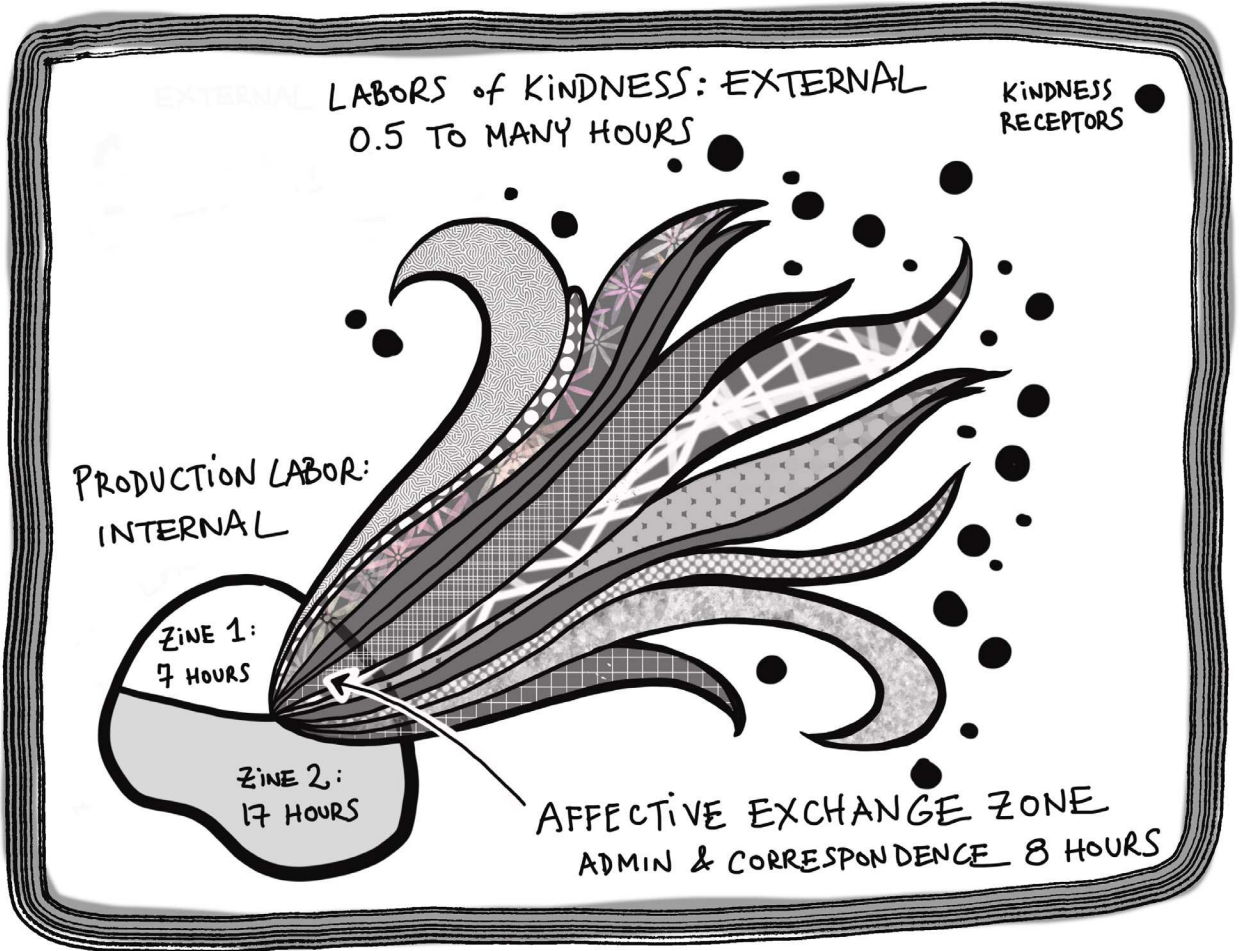
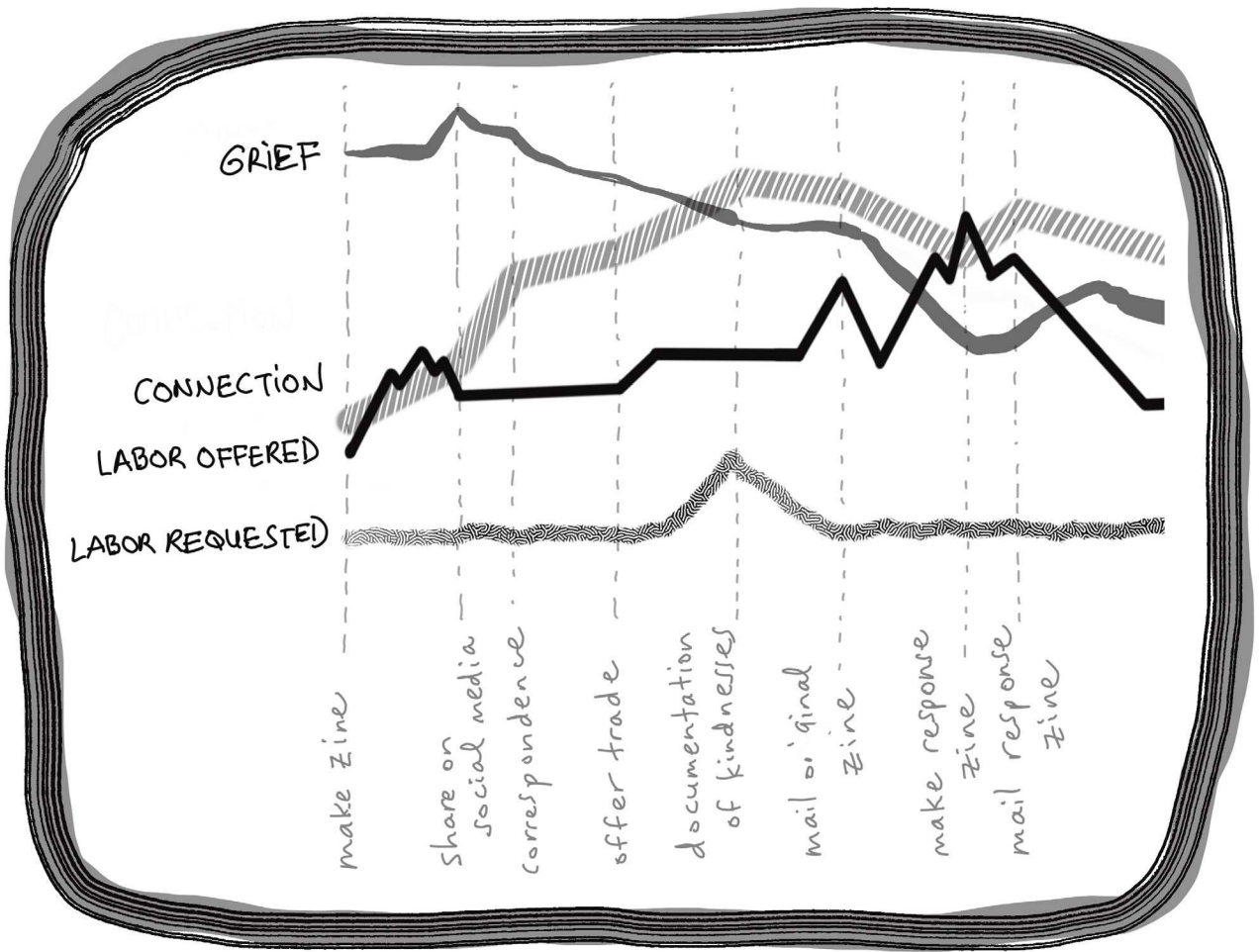
It felt strange to ask for money in return for such an intimate work. Also, one of the strategies I had illustrated in my zine was "offer care to others." So I announced that I would mail a copy of the zine for free to anyone who sent me some kind of documentation of some small act of kindness they were sharing in their own life. I compiled all those responses into a new zine, which I sent back as a pair to the original one for everyone who had contributed a kindness.

I imagined this project as a sort of ripple effect, moving outwards. I underestimated how much the correspondence, the sweetness of peoples' actions and sharings, the sheer exchange of affective labor and intimacy would ripple back and cheer me up. While I did not ask for much labor in return for all the work—just an anecdote or a text message or a photo—I got a glimpse into the work that so many do on a daily basis to try to make the world a little easier for others.





3 graphs showing different ways of measuring
 exchange in this project (clockwise from left):
Exchange Geography
Exchange Timeline
Exchange of Productive and Affective Labor





Rachael Anderson and Rebecca Copper together in Rachael's apartment, photo by Left-Handed Sophie (2019).

Transactional ←

Rebecca Copper

In conversation with my friend, Rachael, the topics of authenticity and ingenuity often surface. Rachael, who is also an artist, is concerned about the lack of authenticity in the artwork they see as well as in the interactions they observe between individuals. I myself have concern for the lack of humility, humanity, and compassion that I witness in the interactions of people. During one conversation in particular, Rachael labeled these superficial interactions as “transactional”, or a relationship developed with the sole purpose of pursuing a goal, be it an expanded network or financial gain. In the discussion we continued to question how people alter how they behave and who they spend their time with based on this drive to receive something.

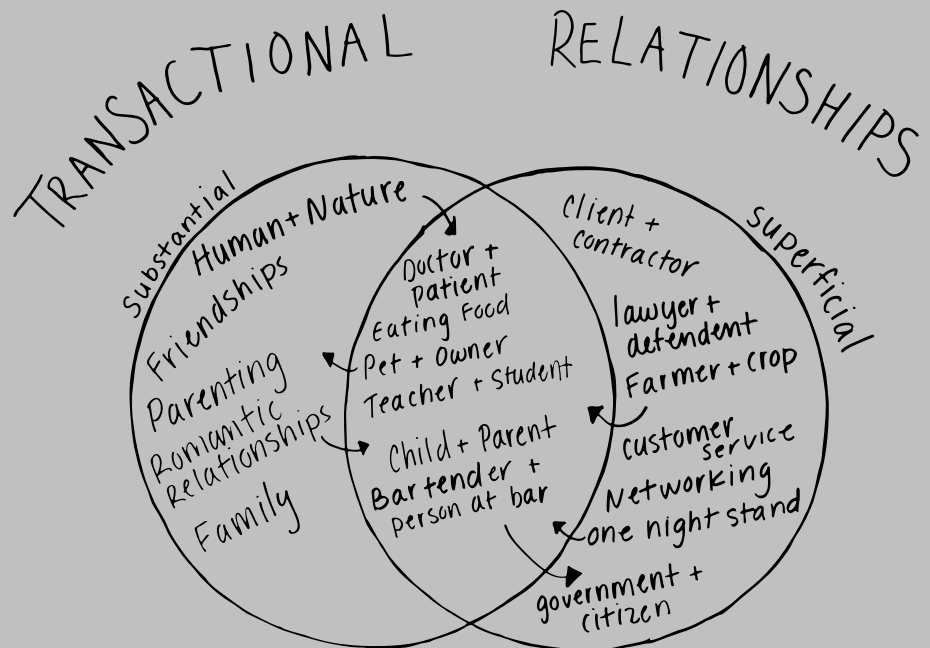
Currently, I am pursuing a contemporary practice of art through social practice. What drew me to this kind of artistic practice was an interest in the process of evolution as a focus of art-making in combination with valuing the space that exists in the interaction between individuals. I have worked in this medium for the past few years, but as I become more familiar with the role of the artist in social-cooperative artworks I question: where do these artists sit on a spectrum of substantial relationships and

transactional, superficial relationships?

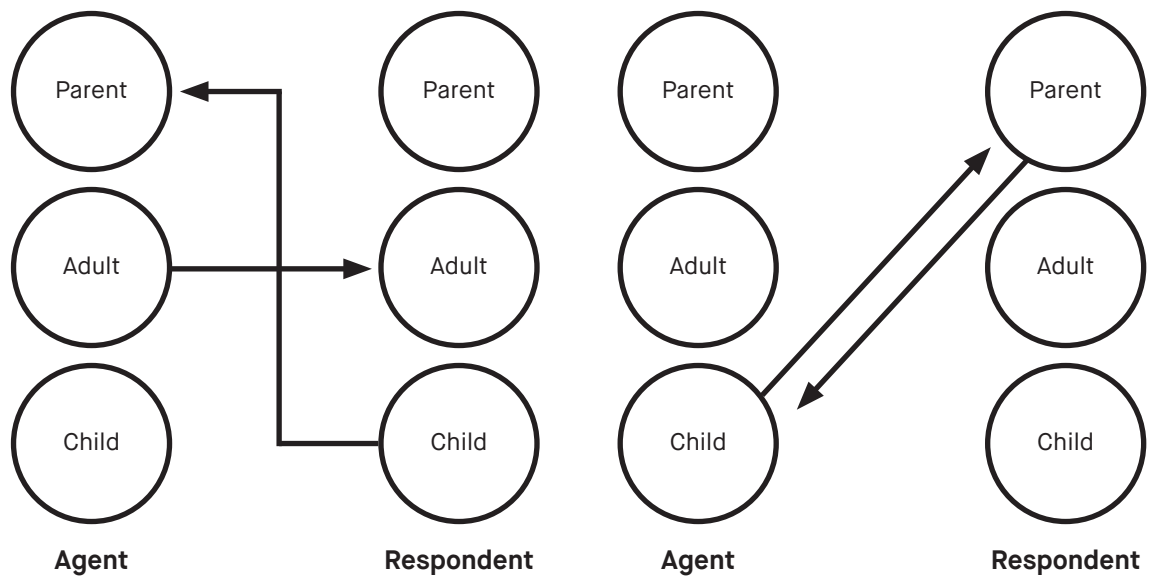
In many socially engaged artworks, the artist acts as an instigator or facilitator working with people or participants. This implies that for the artist's project to be successful on any scale, there needs to be some kind of engagement from a participant or a number of participants. Therefore, this would

categorize the relationships between artist and participant as transactional, seeing as the engagement would benefit the artwork and artist.

From this point, I think it is important to define the terms substantial, superficial, transaction, and relationship. Lexico.com (n.d.), which is powered by the Oxford



Relationships



Here are two diagrams pulled from a website dedicated to Dr. Eric Berne. These diagrams show two different types of ego states interacting, diagrams by Dr. Eric Berne (1964).

English Dictionary and is often what you'll find when you Google definitions, defines substantial as "of considerable importance, size, or worth." Substantial is also defined as "real and tangible rather than imaginary" (Oxford, n.d.). Superficial is defined as "appearing to be true or real only until examined more closely" (Oxford, n.d.). Transaction is defined as, "An instance of buying or selling something; a business deal" (Oxford, n.d.). It is also defined as "An exchange or interaction between people" (Oxford, n.d.). Relationship is defined by the same source as, "the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected"(Oxford, n.d.).

So, I'm left with my next question: are all transactional relationships unsubstantial or superficial? Personally, I usually don't view things in a strictly binary perspective. I believe there is overlap in all areas of life and that truths blur together to create our very complex layers of experience. From this view, my answer is no. If not all transactional relationships are superficial, what do substantial, transactional relationships look like? Moreover, how does an artist ensure their practice leans more towards genuine and away from superficial transactional?

I imagine that in our own web of relationships, examples of substantial, transactional relationships would be things like (but not limited to) parent-child relationships, romantic relationships, and mentor-student relationships.

If we were to create a Venn diagram of transactional relationships, it might look like the image on the facing page.

In researching transactional relationships on the internet, I stumbled across what is called Transactional Analysis. Transactional Analysis is the method of studying interactions between individuals that was developed by Dr. Eric Berne in the 1950s (International Transactional Analysis Association, 2014). Dr. Berne believed that transaction was the fundamental unit of social interaction. He also believed that the ego exists in three states, Parent, Child, and Adult. The Parent state is where an individual replicates behaviors or feelings that mimic what they observed in their parents or act out parent-like roles. In the Child state, a person will act out in response through feelings and emotions in a similar way that they would have as a child. The Adult state is the last ego state that an individual exists in. In this state, a person has the ability to evaluate and validate information gathered through

the Parent and Child states and to objectively observe reality. Dr. Berne believed that we all interact with one another through transactions with these three ego states.

In the late 1960's M.D. Thomas Anthony Harris, a student of Dr. Berne, published the self-help book, *I'm Okay - You're Ok: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis* (Calcaterra, 2013). This title caught my eye because my husband, who has worked as an environmental education director of a transformational youth camp in the Appalachian foothills of southern Ohio, often referenced this model when working with youth who exemplified emotional responses due to unstable home environments. When a child was acting emotionally unsafe toward themselves or others, Al, my husband, would say something like, "we need to get to a place where I'm okay and you're okay. Right now, it looks like you are not okay, how do we get you to where we are both okay?"

The model outlined in Dr. Harris's book consisted of four life positions that were based on Dr. Berne's psychological set-up in his 1964 book: *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*(Calcaterra, 2013). These four life positions are the following: I'm Not Okay, You're Okay is the life position where

an individual sees themselves in a weaker, unsafe position in comparison to others who they view as strong and more competent. I'm Not Okay, You're Not Okay is the worst life position where an individual believes there is no hope, they see themselves and the rest of the world in a terrible state. I'm Okay, You're Not Okay is where a person feels great about themselves but view others as weaker, less competent, or in a bad state. I'm Okay, You're Okay is the healthiest life position. In this life position, the individual feels confident and good about themselves, and views others as good and competent.

When *Faith Moves Mountains* was a performance in Lima, Peru in which hundreds of volunteers shoveled a large scale sand dune from one place to another (Kester, 2012). The performance was orchestrated by Francis Alÿs in 2002 and was commissioned for the Lima Biennial. According to Grant Kester, the Los Angeles museum presentation of the performance "focused on the spectacle of the volunteers shoveling the sand" (p.68). He describes an image, "Alÿs, Medina, and Ortega all standing together at the performance site with bullhorns and cameras as they prepare to direct and document the labor of five hundred volunteers, mostly young college students from Lima wearing matching shirts emblazoned with the project logo" (p.69).

I would categorize *When Faith Moves Mountains* as a superficial, less substantial, transactional relationship. The artist instrumentalized and directed 500 people in unpaid, hard labor to create a symbolic gesture for an art audience in which the artist was paid and gained international presence. Furthermore, the volunteers were college students that were bused in to stage a performance that was supposed to criticize labor politics of a place without involving the population (Kester, 2012). "The dune was directly in front of a large shantytown with a population of over seventy thousand immigrants, displaced farmers, and political refugees. Few if any of the residents were involved in the project as volunteers. Instead, the town and it's population functioned as a kind of backdrop, an image of the political 'real' (the impoverished, marginal space left to the victims of development and modernization) against which the metaphoric gesture of fruitless labor could take on added resonance" (p. 71).

I'd like to argue that Alÿs is taking the life position of I'm Okay, You're Not Okay. Alÿs has assumed a role of power with his bullhorn in hand, dictating volunteers and students in a performance of hard physical work.



Meanwhile, ignoring the people of the place that the project is supposed to represent. A perspective can be taken that the volunteers and residents of the nearby town were not left in a place of I'm Okay, whereas Alÿs left the project with more institutional clout and money. The unpaid volunteers were likely exhausted from shoveling sand for hours and the residents were not given agency but used as a superficial element to Alÿs staging. The ego state interaction which Alÿs falls within is likely one of the following two states: Parent or Child, or maybe a mix of the two. Alÿs mimics the role of a parent instructing the student volunteers, asserting his Parent ego state. Alÿs, also could be fulfilling his Child ego state by emotionally reacting to his poetic imagination or romanticizing the political issues around labor in Lima.

When interacting in the unstable ego states and the three unhealthy life positions previously mentioned, we pursue unsubstantial, transactional relationships. I'd like to push this further to advocate for socially engaged artists to be aware of their own ego states and life positions. If instrumentalization of people or participants is an element of conceptual rigor in a project, ensure that you are aware of it happening and why it is happening.

If you have thoughts, ideas, resources related to my questions and research please write to me OR if you just want to have a conversation: rebeccaLcopper@gmail.com

Two kids from the youth camp, Camp Oty'okwa in the Hocking Hills of Ohio, photo by Al Marietta (2017)

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BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Learning Through Our Difference

Emily Fitzgerald



This morning, while on vacation in Mexico, I read a news article about a shooting in Florida. The article mentioned one of the victims, a 27 year old male UPS driver, who had picked up a shift and was caught in the crossfire. The story showed a photo of the victim's grieving mother. At the end of passage, almost as an afterthought, a second victim was mentioned, a 72 year old man who also died while on his way home from work. I couldn't help but wonder if this man's age was the reason he was getting such a brief mention—as if he might have died soon anyway.

My husband used to work at a children's hospital with state of the art facilities, and doctors and nurses from the highest caliber schools. He now works in skilled nursing at an assisted living facility for senior citizens, where he was hired straight out of nursing school. This facility, like many others, is desperate for nurses, especially those from high-caliber schools. During his training period they were so short-staffed, they called him in to work a shift on his own.

Both of these examples, among many others, leave me questioning the position of the

most experienced members of our culture. I would imagine that every young or middle-aged person would be interested in older people, considering that if we are lucky we are all going to experience being old one day. It seems that we would want to spend time with old people, if for no reason other than the fact that many people seem to want to know what to expect in the future. Or, perhaps a reason why generations are so segregated in the U.S. is that people are scared of the future, scared of growing old, and scared of dying.

Intergenerational work implies an exchange between different generations, but is typically understood as younger people working with senior citizens. How, as a society, do we define intergenerational work? Age may be the defining characteristic, but I wonder how much the desire really has to do with age, as much as difference of experience.

To me, intergenerational work has to do with understanding the perspectives of someone with a different personal, social, and political lens created by the passing of time. It has to do with learning from those who, in their many years, have (likely) made more mistakes than I have. It has to do with a



Visiting with Thelma Sylvester in her living room in 2016, during the People's Homes project.



Nonnie and I on my Uncle's back porch.

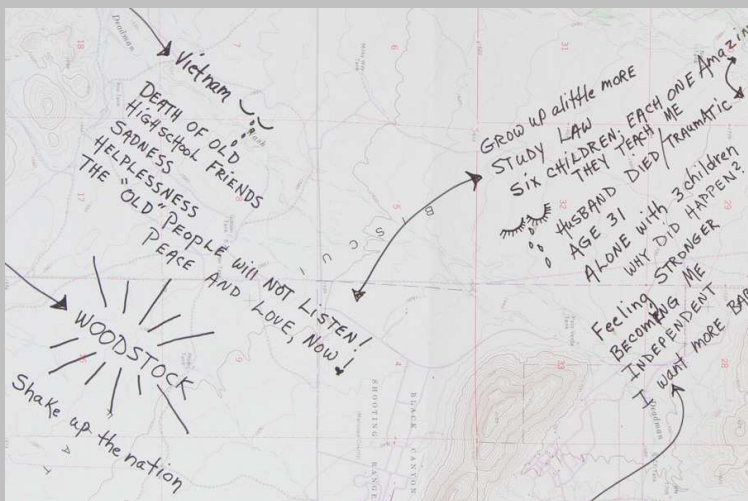


Participants from Some Time Between Us, an intergenerational project with youth at Beaumont Middle School and senior citizens from the Hollywood Senior Center.

relationship to time—which I seem to have no innate understanding of. And, hopefully, the longer you live, the more comfortable you become with change. I want to become more comfortable with change. Hopefully the longer you live the more comfortable you are with yourself. I want to be more comfortable with myself. I have talked to many older people who say they are now more comfortable in their own skin. I wonder if this is something young people can learn from elders or if we need to go through the process of aging in order to get there.

There is a societal perception that our value decreases with age. There must be a part of me that believes this, at least about myself, because as I prepare to leave my 30's, I sometimes feel that my own value is decreasing. This is why personal exchange feels so valuable in this type of work. An older person that has been able to disregard harmful societal messages about value and

Part of a map sharing impactful events from the life of a senior participant in Some Time Between Us.



become comfortable in their own skin has so much to teach us all.

So often with age comes lack of energy, decline of the body, and many other feelings that I want to avoid. There is no universal value that people of any generation provide, so I guess some of the value is in relating and listening to each other because we learn from understanding our differences.

I started doing what may be officially called intergenerational work when my Nonnie (grandmother) passed on. By that, I mean I worked with senior citizens that I wasn't related to and brought groups of young people and older people together for different types of exchanges. I learned to use the term passed on, instead of passed away from the family of a wonderful 93-year-old who I worked with on a project. I like it more; it helps me feel like they are not totally gone. While working with seniors over the past five years, I have lost a lot of people I loved. Sometimes it is so easy to fall in love, especially with someone who has lived a very long time and has an ease of perspective

that I always seem to be searching for. The sadness can take a toll after a while though; building relationships only to say goodbye so soon.

With my Nonnie, I had 34 years to build a relationship, to know her and to ask her questions. She was one of my soul mates. Our kindred connection seemed to transcend age, time, and

dysfunctional family dynamics. With her I got to be myself. Someone seeing me in my best light helped me become the angel she thought I was. At least with her. She knew me before I guarded myself against loss and hurt and held that vision of me even when I didn't feel it. I want everyone, young and old, to have an opportunity to be seen in their best light.

At some point I formalized the exchange with my grandma and we started working on a socially engaged photography and video project together. I documented my grandma's life through photographs over the years. During the last year of her life I began to document our exchange, our relationship. I wanted to shift the power dynamic of me being "the photographer" and her "the subject"—we both became photographer and subject. She took photos of me and I took photos of her. We staged images of us together and filmed our exchange. We sang songs and she wrote a children's story. This collaboration supported our relationship and I think we got to know each other in new and different ways. So many things made us different, but it didn't matter. There was a lightness and curiosity, rather than judgment of our difference.

How do we find and create more of these types of exchanges? Exchanges that add value to our lives and the lives of others? What does it mean to build that type of exchange between seemingly disparate people? How do we go about building alternate forms of exchange, interactions that are not built around transaction but on creating new paradigms, even if temporary? This is of endless interest to me—how to build or support infrastructures, environments, or relationships that encourage meaningful exchange, especially among people who are different from one another.

During an intergenerational project with youth from Beaumont Middle School and elders from Hollywood Senior Center I was interested in creating an exchange where youth and seniors could explore both the commonalities and differences between generations. As the creative producer of the project, I began by asking myself what my role was in bringing these two generations together, when I didn't belong to either group? Wanting to make sure that the youth and seniors were directing the exchange, I started the project with seniors writing questions they wanted to ask the youth, and the youth writing questions they wanted to ask the seniors.

Similarly, I questioned how we were going to be able to dig deeper into more meaningful and intimate exchanges with a group of strangers when we only had six weeks together. An activity where participants mapped all the people and experiences that greatly impacted their lives helped guide the interactions in meaningful ways. Young people shared their fear of coming out as queer. Seniors shared how they understood the word 'queer'. Students talked about depression and experiences with self-harm. One girl and older woman bonded over a love of the ukulele. One day a senior and youth came to our meeting in matching shirts. Both groups shared about people and loves that they had lost. Both groups shared their fears about the future.

After several projects that lasted less than a few months, I was ready to work on something longer-term. Molly Sherman, one of my collaborators and dear friend, and I were thinking a lot about the ways in which we, as young white artists living in NE Portland, were contributing to gentrification. We wanted to learn about our neighborhoods

from people who really understood the history of this place. Our project, People's Homes, paired longtime residents of NE Portland with local artists to create small-scale front yard billboards that shared the homeowners' lived experience. That year we spent a lot of time in people's kitchens and living rooms getting to know the homeowners and their families. Collaborating artists also spent a lot of time with the residents and created custom pieces for the homeowner's front yards based on their exchanges. In addition to the front yard billboards, we created a newsprint publication featuring conversations between the artists and homeowners, project documentation, a map of the signage installations, biographies of the project participants, and interviews with art writer Lucy Lippard about her examination of art, place, and social engagement, and Norman Sylvester about his strong commitment to community and honoring the history of North and Northeast Portland. Since the project was completed in 2016, some of the older homeowners have passed away, people who had become so dear to me. I wonder if this kind of loss is a deterrent for people engaging in work with old people.

The senior from People's Homes that lives closest to me is Paul Knauls. He just turned 89 on January 22nd this year. He has so much energy. In November he told me he hadn't stayed home one Saturday night since May because he was invited to so many events and parties by his friends in town. He sends me photos of the new babies born into his family or moments when he is honored by another community plaque or mural. I stop in to see him occasionally and we chat at Geneva's Shear Perfection, the barber shop he owns. We talk about his granddaughters, my work, what he is doing in the

community, and anything funny that has happened to either of us since we saw each other last. He works at the shop seven days a week greeting people with his contagious laugh and exuberant smile.

When I returned from my vacation in Mexico about a week ago, I felt the weight of a return to the Pacific Northwest during the darkest days of winter. I wasn't really excited to be back here and was missing the way strangers interact more freely when the sun is out, or in smaller communities. My husband and I went to the grocery store and the first person we ran into was Paul. His huge smile reminded me that this place isn't so bad after all. During our short catch up I noticed he was holding on to the shelf next to the Opal apples, his favorite. I guess in your late 80's, your balance isn't the best. He seems so youthful, but even if he lives to 100 he is still nearing the end of his life.

This exchange reminded me of the importance of knowing and sharing life with people of different generations—not just youth—but people much older than us as well. In our neighborhoods. At the grocery store. People that we have grown to know. It made me realize that without structures that encourage intergenerational exchange many of us might only know the elders in our own families. I continue to wonder how to build projects that encourage others to foster ongoing intergenerational exchange? How to get people to question the age segregation that exists? How to get people to think about what may be missing in a society that is so segregated by age? And how can we make these questions relevant to people of all ages? Age may be the defining characteristic of intergenerational work, but the value really lies in the depth of experience and perspective that comes with learning through difference.



Front yard installation created by Patricia Vazquez in partnership with Paul Knauls for the People's Homes project.

THAN
K YOU
FOR YO
UR LET

TER H
ENRY
HAS N
EWMA

Snippets from a mail correspondence between Roshani Thakore and David Wilson in December 2019 - January 2020.



RKER
S.

Roshani Thakore has made Portland her home because of the MFA program. Because of her professor, Sarah Mirk, she introduced a layer of correspondence into her practice in 2019. Thanks to David Wilson, that layer has exploded.

David Wilson is the Guest Artist-in-Residence for the 2019-20 MFA in Art and Social Practice cohort. He was invited by cohort member, Roshani Thakore, to participate in this issue of SoFA to highlight both of their correspondence practices.



DW
811 59th ST.
OAKLAND, CA
94608 To: ROSHANI
3936 NE 12th Ave
PORTLAND, OR
97212



A BRIEF SHOWING OF A NEW
LARGE SCALE DRAWING* BY
DAVID WILSON, IN A GARAGE

*PLUS ONE MEDIUM SIZED DRAWING & ONE
SMALL DRAWING, ALL FROM ONE PLACE

PLEASE BE WELCOME:
811 59th ST.
OAKLAND, CA
[Go back through the side gate]

OPENING & CONCERT
FRIDAY APRIL 26, 2019 6pm-10pm
GARDEN PERFORMANCE BY:
MOHAN RANGAN GOVINDARAJ
SOUTH INDIAN CARNATIC BAMBOO FLUTE
WITH ACCOMPANISTS 7:30pm

OPEN STUDIO, SUNDAY APRIL 28, 10am-6pm
or email: ribbonspublications@gmail.com for an
appointment anytime between April 26 - May 6

HELLO

DAVID!

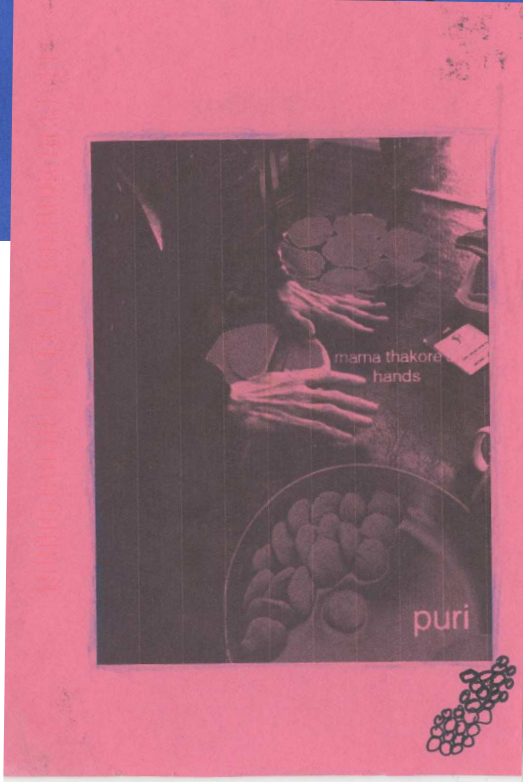
AM ATLANTA. I AM WRITING TO YOU FROM THE DESIGN MUSEUM. IT'S MY FIRST TIME AND MY SECOND ART INSTITUTION I VISITED TODAY, IT'S ALSO THE SECOND PLACE WHERE I'VE SAT DOWN AND MADE A THING. I DIDN'T KNOW THIS ABOUT MYSELF, BUT I GUESS I REALLY BELIEVE IN ART INSTITUTIONS OTHER THAN A WALK IN A PARK UNDERGOING CONSTRUCTION, I HAVEN'T VENTURED THAT MUCH THIS TRIP SO FAR AND KEEP LOOKING UP INSTITUTIONS TO VISIT. THE REBEL IN ME IS CONFUSED OR I'M JUST IN DENIAL. ANYWAY, THERE IS A DISSENT SHOW HERE WITH MANY VISUAL LANGUAGES OF RESISTANCE. IT'S QUITE NICE TO SEE EVERYTHING TOGETHER.

AFTER A RAPID TEAM, IT'S NICE TO SLOW DOWN A BIT WITH THE FAM. ARE THING SLOWING DOWN IN YOUR WORLD?

SPEAKING OF STARING AT TO BRING A GIANT SFT LEFT IN THE

IE I'M STER. IT'S LANGTZE only 3 son, mi

WHO DO YOU WANT TO WORK WITH?



HI DAVID!
JUST GOT BACK FROM SEEING MY MAMA A OF THE FAM. IN ATL, GA. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR FAM, BUT FOOD IS SO IMPORTANT IN CONNECTING IN THE THAKORE HOUSEHOLD. MY MOM IS A MEAN COOK OF GUJARATI FOOD AND EVEN THOUGH WE ARE EXTREMELY DIFFERENT, IT'S THROUGH MAKING AND SHARING FOOD THAT WE'RE ABLE TO CONNECT. DO YOU HAVE ANY DISHES YOU LOVE TO SHARE WITH YOUR FAMILY? I USED TO HATE COOKING BUT NOW LOVE COOKING WITH PEOPLE AND ON MY OWN TO DECOMPRESS. WHEN I WAS A KID I HELPED MY MOM MAKE PURI, THIS PUFFY BREAD FROM NADIA IN HEAT FLORA. THE PROCESS IS QUITE MEDITATIVE. YOU USE A SPECIAL ROLLING PIN. DO YOU SON HELP YOU WITH ANYTHING? - Rob

PORTLAND OR
16 JUN 2000 PM 11



DAVID WILSON
811 59TH ST
OAKLAND, CA 94608



1-9-20

HI ROSHANI!

THANKS FOR THE NOTE
AND THE PHOTO OF
YOUR MOM'S HANDS
COOKING.

MY MOM AND I DIDNT
HAVE A COOKING
CONNECTION (SHE WAS
A TUNA-FISH OUT OF
THE CAN KINDA LADY),
BUT SHE DID INTRO-
DUCE ME TO THE JOYS
OF A PHOTOCOPY MACHINE.

WE HAD A LITTLE ONE
IN OUR HOUSE AND I
SPENT PLENTY OF HOURS
MAKING COPIES OF MY
HANDS, FACE, ETC.

neopost
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
01/13/2020
US POSTAGE \$001.00
ZIP 94720
041112204139



ROSHANI
THAKORE
2936 ME 12TH AV

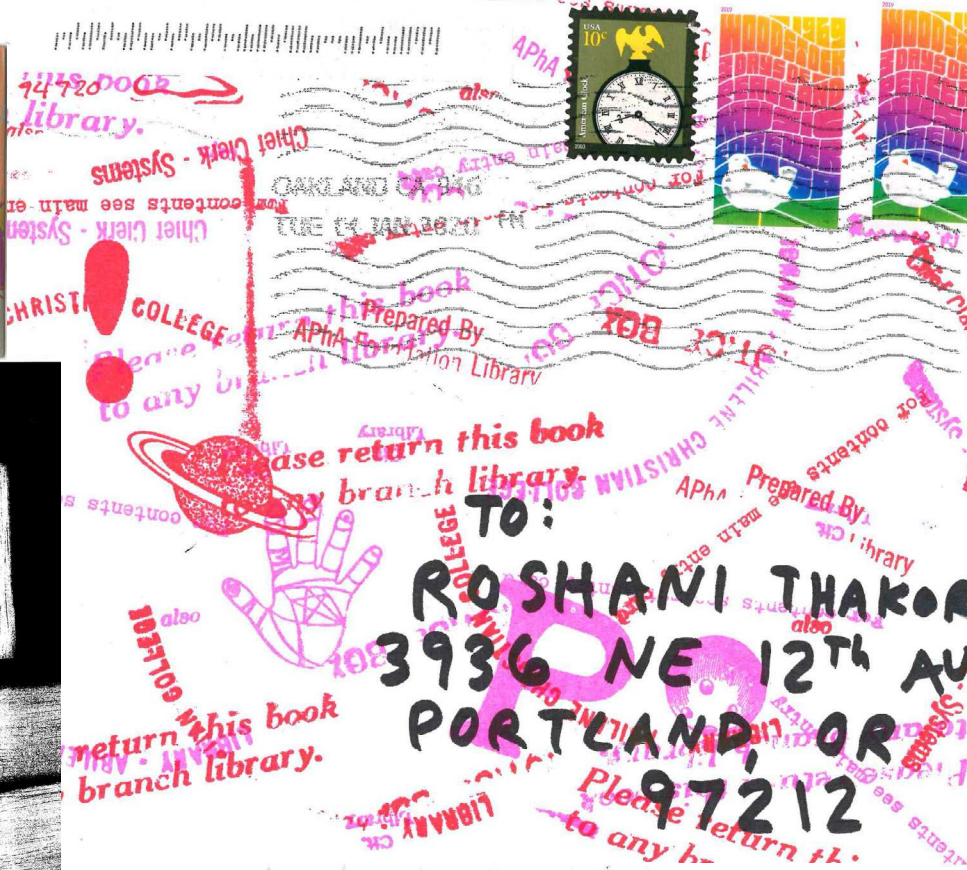
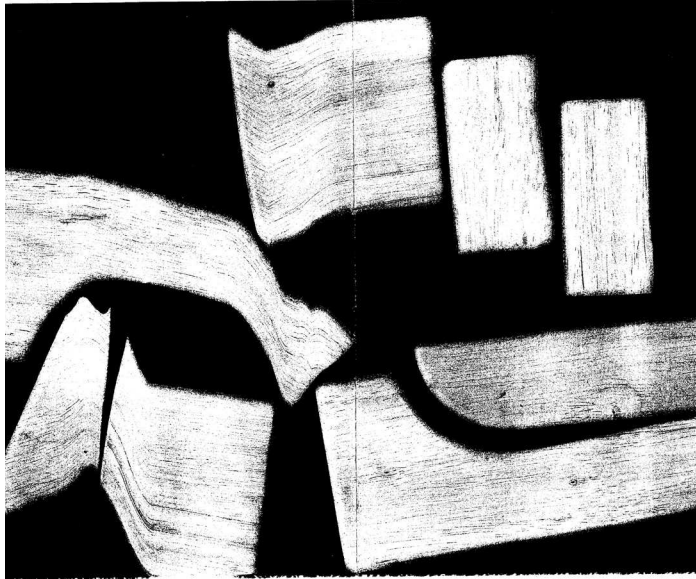
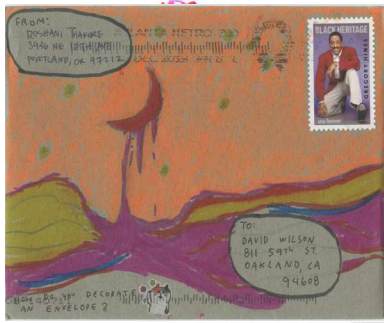


IT HAS ACTUALLY
BEEN A FUN THING
TO WORK ON WITH
HENRY. HE GETS
THE SAME GIDDY
REACTION THAT I DO
SEEING THE LIGHT
PASS AND THE PAPER
PULVE THROUGH TO
POP OUT AN IMAGE.

WE HAVE BEEN DOING
PRINTS OF OUR HANDS
LATELY AND YOUR NOTE
MADE ME THINK OF THAT
SO HENRY & I DID SOME
PRINTS FOR YOU OF
OUR HANDS & OTHER
STUFF.

enjoy!
x dw





IN TERMS OF THIS PROJECT

THINKING
 IN TERMS OF
 'SCORES'
 HELPS ME FOCUS
 ON DESIGNING
 A PROCESS
 FOR
 HOW
 WHEN
 WHO
 I WANT TO WORK
 (WITH)

~~PLEASE~~

THIS
 I HAVE SCORED
 MY PSU INVOLVEMENT
 TO ENCOURAGE
 MY ACTIVE
 USE OF
 MY TIME
 IN THE EVENINGS,
 AT HOME,
 AND OFTEN WITH
 MY SON HENRY.

~~PLEASE~~
 I WANT TO DEEPEN
 AND PLAY WITH MY
 ENGAGEMENT IN
 MAIL-PRINT-~~THE~~
 ~~THE~~ "SPECIAL"
 FORMS OF
 COMMUNICATION
 AS I OFFER YOU
 ALL SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

W.A.G.E.

A.K. Burns talks to Spencer Byrne-Seres about the beginnings of W.A.G.E, an artist initiated non-profit that advocates for sustainable relationships between artists and institutions.

Spencer:

In thinking about the foundation of W.A.G.E., I'm interested in artist compensation, and how W.A.G.E. was recognizing those things for the first time. I'm really interested in what led to the coming together of this group to talk about these issues. What were those conversations initially about?

A.K.:

Well, in its inception, it was really A.L Steiner and I just having some gripey conversation and complaining. It stemmed from something that Steiner brought up because she had just been in Spain and had done this installation where she actually got paid a separate fee on top of the exhibition costs being covered. Which was something she hadn't experienced before. We talked about how rare that was. And began to really pick apart and question why it was so rare.

This conversation occurred in 2007, probably about a year before we made our first public statements as W.A.G.E. I had also just started grad school, so I personally wasn't interfacing with arts organizations on that scale yet, but I had experienced the problem

of how to cover the cost of producing a work for exhibition and the ongoing costs of supporting my practice, which always required (and still does to this day) having a job on top of my work as an artist. And of course I was very much in the midst of incurring the debt of grad school, as an 'investment' towards that career. And while I knew a few artists who survived off the art market (people with extremely focused object/material based practices), most, even those with very large international careers were teachers or had some other means to support their work.

Once we started to recognize that it was possible to be paid for the work we do as artists then we began to wonder why there seemed to be systemic obstacles to being paid for what we contribute to society? And by work, I do not mean the artwork itself, I mean all the office work it takes to run a studio and produce exhibitions beyond just the making of the work. So many emails, archiving, PR, promotion, writing, mapping out, planning, organizing, communicating and the management of others for various aspects of production. I would say personally, about a half or a third of my time in the studio is actually spent making artwork.

Also in 2007, we were on the threshold of the economic collapse of 2008. But we didn't know it yet. When we looked around the art market appeared to be rapidly proliferating.

Everyone was rushing to get MFAs like never before—until the mid-90s it was fairly rare for artists to get MFAs. Art Basel founded Art Basel Miami in 2002 and from there art fairs began popping up. It's now a nearly continuous stream of fairs year round. Yet when we looked at ourselves and our peers, primarily queers, women, and those working in less commodifiable modes of art—which makes up a substantial part of art production and is highly valued by museums and non-profit institutions because it is seen as more 'radical'—it became clear that this boom served to support very few. And that everyone else was working double time to have a very basic level of economic sustainability. I think there was, historically, a notion that artists were poor until they died (and value increased post mortem). But by the 70s and 80s we began to see artists make real money within their lifetime. The romantic model shifted as neo-liberal policies and late capitalism took hold in the Regan/Bush/Clinton eras. By the late 90s into the mid-2000s I think it became a kind of fever to create a massive art market in a belief that artists would be supported by that market. Silently we were all speculating, assuming it was just a matter of time till we 'made' it.

Spencer:
Right.

A.K.:

Then it was like a light bulb went off, 'making' it, ie. meeting the demands of having an art career, has very little to do with the 'market.' And we called up a group of friends, of other artists, inviting them over to engage this discussion more broadly, I don't remember who all was there. K8 Hardy for sure. I know we called Sharon Hayes but she couldn't make it. And from that meeting in early 2008, we did what you do when you're angry about an issue, we wrote a manifesto. The W.A.G.E. wo/manifesto.

Sometimes I think some of the success of this project was that we did not take ourselves all that seriously. Because it all seemed so far fetched. We wrote a manifesto so that we could vent. So we could get it off our chests, but I don't think we understood it as structural to making something far bigger.

Spencer:

How did W.A.G.E. go from being a mode of venting to a real public project?

A.K.:

We didn't really have an idea of what it meant to publish the wo/manifesto or how to put it into the world. But then K8 Hardy got invited to the first Creative Time Summit: Democracy Now to give some kind of stump speech. K8 was like "Well, I don't have anything in particular I want to present, but I have this group that I'm working with. That we've got this idea. We'll make speeches." The three of us (Hardy, Steiner and I) wrote speeches.

So on September 27, 2008 we went out there gave those speeches and beforehand we were joking around, saying "Okay, this is probably the end of our art careers. But I guess we didn't have much to begin with so it doesn't really matter."

It just seemed like a great opportunity to make some noise about something that we've been thinking about. And then from that moment on, it was like a deluge. We pointed out the elephant in the room and everybody was like, "oh this is really important and we have to talk about this and think about this and act on this." It was also, of course, on the threshold of Obama's election. At this point, the election had not happened, but the economic crash had. And it would seem like economic collapse would be a bad time to ask for change and more fiscal support. But it was good timing in terms of people being willing to rethink old models.

From that moment on, there was a lot of requests to do talks, and educate people on the ideas about inequity, especially in the non-profit model. Which is what W.A.G.E. focuses on.

Spencer:

Can you explain how you built W.A.G.E.'s critique around issues in non-profits as opposed to the for profit gallery system?

A.K.:

Well galleries, as fucked-up as they are, have an economic system in place. And I think we were aware early on about having a single issue to build our platform on. With the small amount of resources we have as a group, remaining single issue, I think, is why we are still functioning. And because the non-profits (arts spaces & museums) made up most of our careers and of those around us, you can have a fairly huge career but spend most of your time rotating through public institutions. For some artists, galleries are more of a badge of alignment than an actual source of money. And galleries like to have 'radical' artists who don't really sell on their roster to make them look more diverse.

When we started to break things down, it became very clear. We were like, "Okay, these are nonprofits. They are tax-free because they are educational institutions." Then you have to wonder... "Who's the educator? Oh yes, the artist is the educator." Then the educator must be paid for their work just like everyone else at the organization. And we also started digging into the archives at MoMA where we found really amazing documents like the papers from Art Workers Coalition and the Hollis Frampton letter to the Director of MOMA, when they wanted to do a retrospective on his films. And he was asking for something like \$200 for the whole retrospective. Some measly amount. Over the course of a four page letter he painstakingly explains how the projectionist expects to get paid, and the how the person who develops his film expects to be paid, etc, everyone else in the process of making and displaying art expects to get paid. And Frampton had gotten this letter from the director saying, "It was for love and honor so there's no money included." And Frampton is like, "I can't tell all these other people that it's for love and honor." It's a very eloquent rant on how there's an illogical romance around the artist. That somehow we function outside of the economy because we have this passion that drives us. Like we'll make the work regardless. But no

matter how illogical it is to be an artist, it's no excuse to be seen as free cultural labor. Or to expect that the cultural capital you get from showing at the MoMA will result in sales. That's not a real equation.

Spencer:

There is this idea that somehow the freedom involved to do what you want to do means you don't have to suffer through a regular type of compensation structure or something.

A.K.:

Right. Also how do you compensate for something like this? And this became a real problem for us when we started to think about how you create any kind of equity. How do you put a number on art production or the other kinds of labor involved in an exhibition? People do it all the time for the gallery system. But that's also just a weird fiction. It's like, "well this painting's bigger than that painting so it costs more." That has nothing to do how much work you do to make it. There's no labor ratio.

Spencer:

How hard you try on the painting. How many hours you have spent on it...

A.K.:

Like I think for us we were like, "Well, if we're really going to put energy into making this is a real organization, we want it to be productive and make real change in the world." And Art Workers Coalition is amazing. They made a lot of documents and they supported a lot of causes and protested and were crucial to the dialogue going on at that moment around the Vietnam war, etc. But you look at their list of demands and most of those things still have not been met from their 13 demands. I think one of the main things they got was the free nights at museums which are now "Targets-free" nights. And they're one evening a week. But the AWC, they really wanted free museums. Access to culture for everyone.

Spencer:

I wonder if the reason for the lack of compensation was because you had this gallery model. It was assumed that you were selling a bunch of paintings all the time and that was your source of income. And then these exhibitions were, like you said, for love and honor or whatever. What has shifted in terms of artists' practices and what they're doing, that this came into contrast?

Is artists' work not commodifiable in the same way, when you engage with an institution? Or is there an assumption that somebody comes from the museum and just picks up the painting from my studio and I don't have to do much work. It's already there or something like that?

A.K.:

But it's never... Even if you're a painter, it's not that simple. There's a lot of coordinating and talking with the curator and other aspects of an institution. It's like it's a farce that there's not a whole other layer of labor going on beyond the making of work. I've never had a show where a curator just takes something and runs away with it and never talks to you about it. No artist would want to engage in that. It's an ongoing conversation and it's many meetings and it's planning and it's like, and depending on the scale of the show there could be a public conversations or writing to coordinate. Then there is coordinating pick-ups and drop-offs and packaging the art, finding where it is stored. Usually galleries or studio assistants handle a lot of those parts but the people who have those resources are the people who have money to pay for that. And then install can take anything from weeks to a day depending on the scale of the show. I think it's also shifted a lot in the sense that I think the MFA industrial complex really upped the stakes of what artists are investing financially. So a lot of artist start from a point of debt.

Spencer:

It's so interesting to think about the MFA and its role in shifting the economy of being an artist. All of a sudden people were willing to go \$100,000 into debt just to be an artist, right? And that then shifts the stakes of everything, right?

A.K.:

Artists don't really need MFAs. Except to teach but they used to not even need MFAs to teach. I don't think MFAs are a load of shit. I think they can be a very productive time for artists, I mean I got one and I teach in MFA programs, so dare I be a hypocrite? But I know I felt like I was buying time I couldn't get on my own because I was so busy working instead of making art. So it's a perverse situation where you buy yourself time to develop because there is no time in this economy that doesn't cost money. Especially given the cost of living in cultural hubs like New York.

Spencer:

And one of the few jobs that exists for an

artist to teach, right? Like that's a salaried job where I get to be an artist and paid for my knowledge in that field.

A.K.:

It's a real Catch 22 in many ways. MFAs to teach but not enough well paid positions for the amount of MFAs so that's not really a sustainable model either. Hence why nonprofits need to step up to the plate and pay fees for exhibiting. We need these things to have a healthy cultural eco-system. Artist fees aren't about getting rich, they are about providing more support for diverse practices.

Spencer:

And it's all within a capitalist structure that we live in now. It's economized no matter what you are doing.

A.K.:

Yes first it was the loft living boom of the late 90s that transformed every medium to large city in the United States (San Francisco, Portland, New York, LA..etc) and dare I say worldwide became deeply gentrified and turned into these hipster villages. A lifestyle that has become a commodified, rather than a form of survival for those who need other kinds of spaces for the specific way artist work. And now many artists go without studios or have downsized practices out of their bedrooms. Then came the gig economy and things like WeWork that also evolved from practical situations that were created to manage the precarity of being an artist. I often think we have a much bigger influence on society in the way it's economically structured than through the culture we make. Do you know what I mean?

Like this whole gig economy stuff and the way that artists function, is a very high risk lifestyle. It's actually not something that large portions of the population should be doing. Nor is a loft a great way to live, unless you have money to burn on a massive heating bill.

Spencer:

There's no job security. There's no benefits.

A.K.:

Yeah, it's just like you are spinning your wheels in something that is exploiting you. And I think part of what W.A.G.E. is acknowledging, is that, we as artists we are participating in being exploited. Because we are often willing to ignore the monetary relationships to how we move through the world because we are 'dreamer' types. I mean you have to be, like I said, kind of nuts to be an artist.

We're not the best at making logical decisions for ourselves, I think. W.A.G.E. offered a kind of retraining not just for institutions and their responsibility to artists, but the way artists are responsible for the systems they participate in.

Spencer:

And there's this perception that it is a privilege to be an artist, right?

A.K.:

Well, it enforces that. If you're not paying the educator at a nonprofit organization and your a tax deductible organization, you're actively eliminating the artists with fewer resources who cannot afford to participate for free. It very much benefits the artists who are already privileged enough to take the risks.

Spencer:

Yeah, and I think about that a lot. And risk, in general, a lot about who's able to take risk, right?

A.K.:

Yeah, and then there's the burn out, where all of us are taking risk, risk, risk and at a certain point, you're like I can't do it anymore. Can I sustain this? What's the value of my limited amount of life energy and labor? You know what I mean? Yet the art system seems to want it, right? They're hungry. They're just pushing out exhibition after exhibition after exhibition and they need programming, programming, programming.

It's been almost 12 years now since we started W.A.G.E.. And there's a whole younger generation of artists and they're not fucking around. They don't go and do something if someone's not paying them. Like they expect to have a discussion about money. I see this more and more over the years since we started. It used to be an almost unheard of conversation.

Spencer:

And a big part of it, I think, is recognizing that social capital doesn't feed you. Like feed your body.

A.K.:

Yeah, that romance is dead. W.A.G.E. killed that romance. That was our primary goal. I think that's the one good thing that we did. Your celebrity status is not going to feed you.

Franklin

Box 99
Eaton, New York 13334

January 7, 1973

Mr Donald Richie
Curator of Film
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street
New York, New York 10019

Dear Donald:

I have your letter of December 13, 1972, in which you offer me the honor of a complete retrospective during this coming March. Let me stipulate at the outset that I am agreed "in principle", and more: that I appreciate very deeply being included in the company you mention. I am touched to notice that the dates you propose fall squarely across my thirty-seventh birthday. And I am flattered by your proposal to write notes.

But, having said this much, I must go on to point out some difficulties to you.

To begin with, let me put it to you squarely that anyone, institution or individual, is free at any time to arrange a complete retrospective of my work; and that is not something that requires my consent, or even my prior knowledge. You must know, as well as I do, that all my work is distributed through the Film-Makers' Cooperative, and that it is available for rental by any party willing to assume, in good faith, ordinary responsibility for the prints, together with the price of hiring them.

So that something other than a wish to show my work must be at issue in your writing to me. And you open your second paragraph with a concise guide to what that 'something' is, when you say: "It is all for love and honor and no money is included at all...".

All right. Let's start with love, where we all started. I have devoted, at the nominal least, a decade of the only life I may reasonably expect to have, to making films. I have given to this work the best energy of my consciousness. In order to continue in it, I have accepted...as most artists accept (and with the same gladness)...a standard of living that most other American working people hold in automatic contempt; that is, I have committed my entire worldly resources, whatever they may amount to, to my art.

Of course, those resources are not unlimited. But the irreducible point is that I have made the work, have commissioned it of myself, under no obligation of any sort to please anyone, adhering to my own best understanding of the classic canons of my art. Does that not demonstrate love? And if it does not, then how much more am I obliged to do? And who (among the living) is to exact that of me?

Now, about honor: I have said that I am mindful, and appreciative, of the honor to myself. But what about the honor of my art? I venture to suggest that a time may come when the whole history of art will become no more than a footnote to the history of film...or of whatever evolves from film. Already, in less than a century, film has produced great monuments of passionate intelligence. If we say that we honor such a nascent tradition, then we affirm our wish that it continue.

But it cannot continue on love and honor alone. And this brings me to you: "...no money is included at all...".

I'll put it to you as a problem in fairness. I have made, let us say, so and so many films. That means that so and so many thousands of feet of rawstock have been expended, for which I paid the manufacturer. The processing lab was paid, by me, to develop the stuff, after it was exposed in a camera for which I paid. The lens grinders got paid. Then I edited the footage, on rewinds and a splicer for which I paid, incorporating leader and glue for which I also paid. The printing lab and the track lab were paid for their materials and services. You yourself, however meagerly, are being paid for trying to persuade me to show my work, to a paying public, for "love and honor". If it comes off, the projectionist will get paid. The guard at the door will be paid. Somebody or other paid for the paper on which your letter to me was written, and for the postage to forward it.

That means that I, in my singular person, by making this work, have already generated wealth for scores of people. Multiply that by as many other working artists as you can think of. Ask yourself whether my lab, for instance, would print my work for "love and honor": if I asked them, and they took my question seriously, I should expect to have it explained to me, ever so gently, that human beings expect compensation for their work. The reason is simply that it enables them to continue doing what they do.

But it seems that, while all these others are to be paid for their part in a show that could not have taken place without me, nonetheless, I, the artist, am not to be paid.

And in fact it seems that there is no way to pay an artist for his work as an artist. I have taught, lectured, written, worked as a technician...and for all those collateral activities, I have been paid, have been compensated for my work. But as an artist I have been paid only on the rarest of occasions.

I will offer you further information in the matter:

Item: that we filmmakers are a little in touch with one another, or that there is a "grapevine", at least, such as did not obtain two and three decades ago, when The Museum of Modern Art (a different crew then, of course) divided filmmakers against themselves, and got not only screenings, but "rights" of one kind and another, for nothing, from the generation of Maya Deren.

Well, Maya Deren, for one, died young, in circumstances of genuine need. I leave it to your surmise whether her life might have been prolonged by a few bucks. A little money certainly would have helped her work: I still recall with sadness the little posters, begging for money to help her finish THE VERY EYE OF NIGHT, that were stuck around when I was first in New York. If I can help it, that won't happen to me, nor to any other artist I know.

And I know that Stan Brakhage (his correspondence with Willard Van Dyke is public record) and Shirley Clark did not go uncompensated for the use of their work by the Museum. I don't know about Bruce Bailey, but I doubt, at the mildest, that he is wealthy enough to have travelled from the West Coast under his own steam, for any amount of love and honor (and nothing else). And, of course, if any of these three received any money at all (it is money that enables us to go on working, I repeat) then they received an infinite amount more than you are offering me. That puts us beyond the pale, even, of qualitative argument. It is simply an unimaginable cut in pay.

Item: that I do not live in New York City. Nor is it, strictly speaking, "convenient" for me to be there during the period you name. I'll be teaching in Buffalo every Thursday and Friday this coming Spring semester, so that I could hope to be at the Museum for a Saturday program. Are you suggesting that I drive down? The distance is well over four hundred miles, and March weather upstate is uncertain. Shall I fly, at my own expense, to face an audience that I know, from personal experience, to be, at best, largely unengaging, and at worst grossly provincial and rude?

[4]

Item: it is my understanding that filmmakers invited to appear on your "Cineprobe" programs currently receive an honorarium. How is it, then, that I am not accorded the same courtesy?

Very well. Having been prolix, I will now attempt succinctness. I offer you the following points for discussion:

1] It is my understanding, of old, that the Museum of Modern Art does not, as a matter of policy, pay rentals for films. I am richly aware that, if the museum paid us independent film artists, then it would be obliged also to pay rentals to the Hollywood studios. Since we all live in a free-enterprise system, the Museum thus saves artists from the ethical error of engaging in unfair economic competition with the likes of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. (I invite anyone to examine, humanely, the logic of such a notion.) Nevertheless, I offer you the opportunity to pay me, at the rate of one-half my listed catalog rentals, for the several screenings you will probably subject my prints to. You can call the money anything you like: a grant, a charitable gift, a bribe, or dividends on my common stock in Western Civilization...and I will humbly accept it. The precise amount in question is \$266.88, plus \$54.-- in cleaning charges, which I will owe the Film-Makers' Cooperative for their services when my prints are returned.

2] If I am to appear during the period you propose, then I must have roundtrip air fare, and ground transportation expenses, between Buffalo and Manhattan. I will undertake to cover whatever other expenses there may be. I think that amounts to about \$90.--, subject to verification.

3] If I appear to discuss my work, I must have the same honorarium you would offer anyone doing a "Cineprobe. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that comes to \$150.--.

4] Finally, I must request your earliest possible reply. I have only a limited number of prints available, some of which may already be committed for rentals screenings during the period you specify. Since I am committed in principle to this retrospective, delay might mean my having to purchase new prints specifically for the occasion; and I am determined to minimize, if possible, drains on funds that I need for making new work.

Please note carefully, Donald, that what I have written above is a list of requests. I do not speak of demands, which may only be made of those who are forced to negotiate.

But you must understand also that these requests are not open to bargaining: to bargain is to be humiliated. To bargain in this, of all matters, is to accept humiliation on behalf of others whose needs and uncertainties are greater even than mine.

You, of course, are not forced to negotiate. You are free. And since I am too, this question of payment is open to discussion in matters of procedure, if not of substance.

I hope we can come to some agreement, and soon. I hope so out of love for my embattled art, and because I honor all those who pursue it. But if we cannot, then I must say, regretfully, however much I want it to take place, that there can be no retrospective showing of my work at The Museum of Modern Art.

Benedictions,

Hollis Frampton



Emma Duehr

My houseplant practice is rooted in relationships. I began caring for plants after I moved away from my hometown and began searching for new signifiers of home and friendships. I ended up buying some of my mom's favorite plants: hostas and impatiens, to help make my new house feel like home. This initiated my emotional connection to plants, as I grew to understand the sentimental importance, mental benefits, and self-care routine that is commonly

Most plants can be propagated into completely new plants by solely keeping them in water in the sunshine for about a month until the roots begin to grow. Not every plant likes excessive water, though tropical plants, succulents, and cacti are sure winners. Spring and Summer are the best seasons for successful propagation. Begonias, ctenanthe, peperomias, philodendrons, pilea, rhipsalis, and tradescantias are all types of plants that root well in water. Using a sharp edge, cut just below a node: the site where leaves grow from the stem. Cuttings should be about a foot long; larger clippings create an unhealthy ratio for demanding strong root system. Find a small glass jar such as a mason jar, vase, shot glass, etc. to fill with water. A smaller jar allows the plant's hormones to be released into a lower volume of water which aids for quicker and controlled growth. Pick off any leaves that would touch the water; the leaves can rot and create affect the water quality. Patience is key.

associated with home gardening. I began collecting more plants by attending nurseries, buying from people on Facebook, and exchanging clippings with people around Portland. This is how I ultimately began growing relationships with people in my new town.

Houseplants have been growing in popularity in recent years, which has created various plant community groups across the world. Plants are a growing collectible whose value is dependant on scarce supply, rare species, and age. Due to the rarity of certain plants and increase in demand, people have begun "proplifting" from nurseries, retail stores, and other public places; this refers to clipping off pieces of plants without permission from the owner. Some may call it a "green-collar crime," others say it's being resourceful. The act of taking clippings from plants is extremely resourceful because it allows thriving plants to duplicate and begin again in someone else's life. You don't need to steal from retail stores, because there is actually a large community of people who offer exchange, trade, or sell clippings from their own collection.

Gardeners and plant parents have traded clippings for years because certain plants have become status symbols and others hold

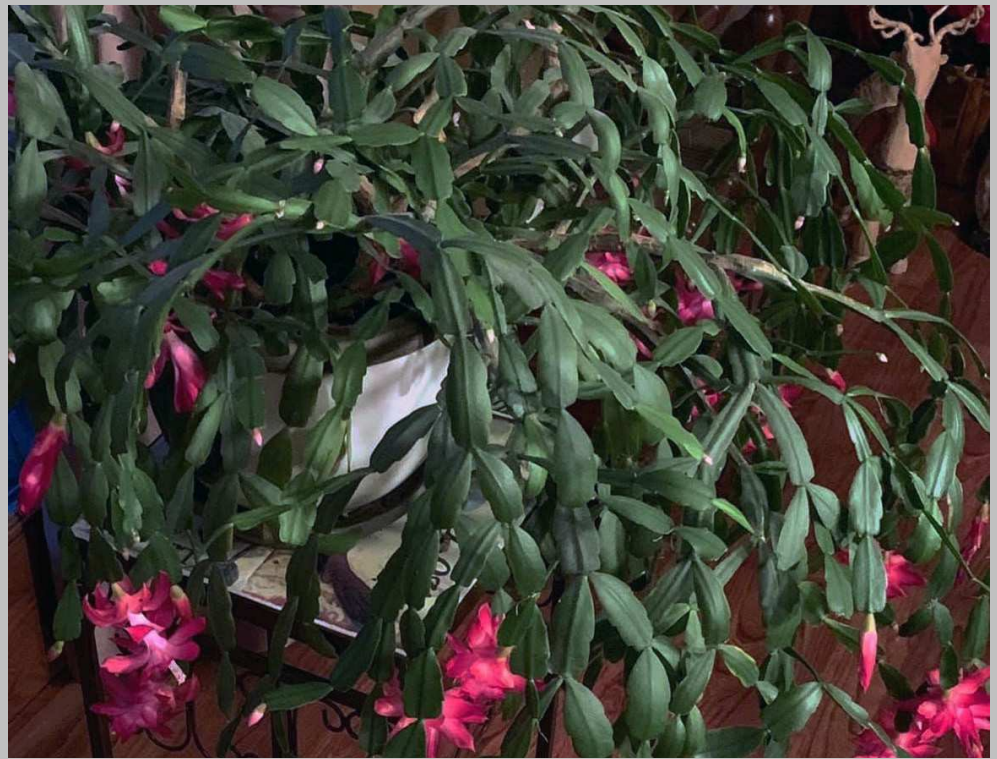
sentimental value. This exchange happens between strangers on the internet, acquaintances at the same local plant swap, or it can be an extremely intentional and thoughtful gift from someone. One consistent component is an exchange of the plant's history; it is important to share the plant's history, story, and best care tips. Through this process, you'll find that many plants have a story to tell. The original plant that has off-shooted new baby plants is commonly referred to as the mother plant; this terminology embodies the possibilities of sharing plants and the relationships that can be built.

My first plant became a piece of my family history. When my aunt's cactus eventually reached the ceiling, she decided to trim, transplant, and gift pieces to different family members. I was one of the nine recipients. Kym states, "I have been cutting from this cactus for over 20 years! I would guess I have gifted these pieces to at least 20 people in my family. The original was my mother-in-law's, which was born around 1990." The passing down of plant clippings is a practice that many families and friends across the world practice. The symbolism of the plants' roots embody the relationships that continue to coexist and add to the historical narrative. "I took many trimmings off it before

Rooted in Relationship

Facing page: The mother plant of the Streff Family Cactus, 2019, Dubuque, Iowa.

Right: Brenda Mitchell's clipping of The Klein Christmas Cactus, 2020, Westwood, Iowa.



it died around the age of 20, luckily many offsprings exist and are thriving in my childrens' homes," said Kym. A clipping from a plant that holds sentimental value is an invitation to a relationship that encourages health, growth, and connection.

I began asking for people to share their own family plant narratives and began archiving them online. Many narratives were shared about passing clippings of "family plants" and the influx of storytelling that transpire from them. Brenda Mitchell is a recipient of a family plant, she said "I've had my Christmas Cactus for over 10 years. It started as a scion from my sister Barb's cactus. She got hers from our Aunt Karen, who is now the caregiver of the first Christmas Cactus that came into our family over 60 years ago. This cactus was cared for and enjoyed by my Great Grandmother Dreyer. Around her death in 1960, it was passed on to her daughter who was my Grandma Klein. Around her death in 2001, it was passed to her son Dan's wife Karen. Several family members have scions from the original or next generation plant. My mother received a scion from the family's original Christmas Cactus in 1959, and she still cares for it today."

Danica Shoffner received a clipping of a jade plant from her grandma when she was moving from her long-time home into assisted living. "I wrapped it up in a napkin and flew back home to Portland. It has grown much since and I hope one day to pass it down to other family members and

share that it was from my grandmother." She says "when I look at it or water it I think of my grandma and grandpa and what wonderful people they are/were. It gives me a sense of connection to them. Something living and growing that very well may live beyond me as well and continue to be shared and bring joy and connection."

The sentimental value of plants can be from the relationships connected to it as well as the relationship you make with the plant itself. Plants communicate with their caretakers, and are proven to provide mental benefits and positive stimuli to the environment and the people within them. Getting dirty in a garden is a natural antidepressant due to the unique microbes in healthy organic soil. It is scientifically proven that plants make us happier and healthier. Plants can also provide metaphoric benefits for the importance of relationships, self-care, and suitable and healthy living environments. I took to the internet to ask specifically what plants do for different people. Facebook groups such as "Houseplant Hobbyists," "Indoor Houseplant Group," "Portland Plant Lovers," Instagram, and my personal website were all platforms where I created an interactive forum to gain research.

Nae Dumouchelle says "The greenery that fills the room allows me to feel more connected to nature within the walls of my home. It feels more lively and I am able to breathe a little better. Physically and spiritually. Mother Earth is our home and my door

will always be open to her and the clippings that she continues to share with us."

Britannie Weaver said "they are a reminder for me to take care of my mental health. When I notice I'm slacking or my plants look like they need love usually I need to take care of myself mentally too."

"I love caring for all living creatures. Whenever I feel high anxiety or panic attacks, I start observing all my plants and seeing what they need and it helps calm me down. Plus, they are just beautiful! Why would you not want to be surrounded by natural beauty," said Sara Campbell

Plants have filled the void in my life after my cat passed away. They need me...and respond to my care with gifts of bloom's and beautiful new foliage. I need to be needed.. and enjoy sharing plants with my loved ones, or really anyone that shows an interest in them. Great way to meet people also," said Patricia Guidry

Roneal H. Torres says, "as a person who tends to procrastinate, having them made me become a lot more organized on how I consume my time. It taught me how to be a responsible individual."

Do you have a family plant? What benefits have plants brought to your life? What sets your plant collection apart? I would love to hear, archive, and share your plant narratives. Send your thoughts to em.duehr@gmail.com or visit www.emmaduehr.com.

Cassie Thornton Wants to Heal the Economy



Zeph Fishlyn

Last October, Cassie Thornton popped up a tent in a downtown Oakland plaza offering “Luxury Real Estate Facials.” This was one of a series of collaborative projects under the title Desperate Holdings Real Estate and Land Mind Spa, using clay gathered from the construction pit underlying San Francisco’s newest and tallest skyscraper, the Salesforce Tower. While her invitations to real estate agents went unanswered, other workers on lunch break and passers-by stopped, talked, lay down, and received facials. They often fell asleep while Cassie read to them from a pamphlet poetically deconstructing the metaphorical and all-too-concrete dynamics of real estate speculation, hyper-inequality, liquidity/illiquidity, insecurity/securitization, and the resulting distortions in the mind, body and spirit of people living under predatory capitalism.

Flash back to another project in fall 2017: a group of men lay on their backs on the floor of a London black box theater with balloons stuffed up their shirts, breathing heavily in time with each other. Cassie Thornton and a crew of female friends strode around in dark balaclavas, spraying them with water. “This is what generosity looks like!” they yell. “We’re doing this because we care about you.” This was a labor ceremony, a birth rite for a new feminist cryptocurrency.

Both of these projects are perfectly logical extensions of Thornton’s career as the director of the Feminist Economics Department (FED). Thornton’s experiments with debt, exchange,

and radical imagination are anchored by her own family experience of having lost a house to predatory lending during the subprime mortgage crisis, a decade teaching in NY public schools, as well as being displaced by gentrification in the Bay Area. I first heard her name in connection with Strike Debt, an offshoot of Occupy Wall Street. Strike Debt organizers started a project called Rolling Jubilee, raising funds to buy up uncollected debt on the secondary market for pennies on the dollar. Then, they notified debtors that their debt was absolved. To date, Rolling Jubilee has abolished almost 32 million dollars in debt.

Thornton graduated from the California College of Art’s graduate Social Practice program in 2012 and currently lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario, also known as the racism and murder capital of Canada. With her partner, Max Haiven, she runs a little institute at Lakehead University called the Reimagining Value Action Lab, or RiVAL. They also co-founded University of the Phoenix, which teaches “courses for the dead that the living can attend,” and is currently developing a series of radical “financial literacy classes”. Under the FED moniker, Thornton’s work includes performance, hypnosis, yoga, visualizations, revenge consulting, do-it-yourself credit reports, interactive gallery installations, a children’s book and grassroots organizing.

The following segments are remixed from two different interviews with Cassie, in October 2018 and December 2019.

Complicating Care

Cassie: My work has two sides. First, there's a direct line of care. And then the other part of it is quite vengeful—about burying some radical politics within a service like yoga or a facial or a workshop or whatever.

I didn't really realize that my work was absurd until recently. I'm from a situationist tradition, from a lineage of performance artists and magicians, but I always thought that all of my projects were really straight. I really thought that I was a person who was going to get a TED Talk, be on Oprah. I made a series of online yoga videos about confronting authoritarianism, confronting our addictions to cell phones and social media, and going beyond financialization to another world. The goal of making the videos and doing live performances was to figure out how to be a good enough yoga teacher to go into corporate yoga studios and deliver a kind of radical politics that nobody knew they wanted. I thought that wearing all black and making these very dark yoga videos was going to be super commercially successful! But I wasn't very good at hiding that this project holds at its centre some aggression. It reveals how yoga is a weapon used by capitalism on us, and questions what it would mean to heal from that.

Most of what I offer is stuff that people don't want. Or they don't know they want it. And so they are not going to pay for it. Maybe eventually they would come back for it. But at that point, I don't really want to give it to them anymore.

A couple of years ago in Miami, I had a residency and I asked to meet with the board of directors of my hosting organization, who are all pretty high level finance workers and corporate lawyers. I did interviews with them about their history of borrowing and lending and then I had them do a hypnosis project where they imagine debt as an image or place. For them, debt is mostly a commodity. We talked about it, we visualized it. A lot happened in the process where people confessed to me about really bad things they had been involved in, and how they felt trapped within the financial system that they were also on top of. This work helps me understand that everyone is suffering and everyone wants a transformation but nobody knows how to do that, because it would mean completely changing their lives, and no one can imagine how to do that alone.

Everyone's suffering right now. There's a lot of fingers being pointed sideways, and not enough fingers being pointed directly up to the things that are actually smashing us. Specifically on the left. We need to support each other to punch up. One of my projects is revenge consulting. It's my job to remind people what the root problems are, problems that are ruining the planet and ruining our ability to actually live together at all. Tech giants are a great example. I think we have to figure out our collective targets. Our targets can't be each other. Many of our common targets have names, addresses, and wives, and we can confront the powerful. That's my game. For me, revenge is most beautiful when it's collective and it's about bringing down something that is collectively oppressing us. Revenge against an economic system, revenge against forms of power and control that are actually dominating our whole experience. And I am not opposed to vandalism either:)

University of the Phoenix and the Radical Financial Literacy Tour

Cassie: I started a project called University of the Phoenix with my partner, Max. We stole the name and image of the University of Phoenix, which is the biggest, most predatory for-profit school in the US. The University of Phoenix really takes advantage of suburban and rural people of color and poor or working class first generation college students. They get a horrible education and spend the rest of their lives paying off a debt for a university degree that actually hurts their ability to get a job. We are like their ghost institution, haunting them and stealing all their nice graphic design.

We teach "courses for the dead that the living can attend." For me, thinking about the dead helps me understand that what I'm working on right now might be the work that someone else started, and someone else may finish my work after I am done. It takes the pressure off, because we're connected to so much and to so many people whom we can't see and who we don't understand. Bringing death and the dead into the room changes the idea of where we are and what we value. It opens up time and a sense of who we are outside of being financialized subjects (for example, the dead don't worry about rent). With the University of the Phoenix, we occasionally do séances. We brought Ursula Le Guin into the room and we brought Hannah Arendt right after Trump was elected. Within

If you already have the means to survive, maybe there are ways to honor your time and work without more money exchange. Just because we're used to using money as a way to show that we appreciate something, doesn't mean it is the only way. Money is not the highest form of flattery!

these big anti-capitalist rituals, we're trying to create transformative situations where we all confront the unknown, and it's funny but it's not a joke. We work hard to create paranormal situations where the world as we know it doesn't seem so closed because we are connected to more than we can see, and a lot more is possible than just continuing to live and work and eat and sleep and consume.

As University of the Phoenix, we also teach a radical financial literacy workshop to help people who feel really mired in debt or other impossible economic conditions. In these workshops for anyone, we specifically focus on the idea that financial survival is not actually an individual responsibility. It's impossible to survive or flourish in this economy, and that's a collective, political, and a social problem. And the only way that we're going to fix things so that more people can thrive is to actually change the economic system. In the workshops we show people how the economic system works, what is it doing to them and to everyone they know, and what it would take to actually confront it as a collective problem and not as a personal issue.

Every institution has so much funding for financial literacy. If you say "financial literacy," it's like a secret passcode, and suddenly a door appears where there was once a wall, and there's a thousand dollars behind it. All over the world, people have decided that everyone needs financial literacy, which could really be called 'capitalist obedience', and there has been so much money thrown

at it. Then we show up, and we say, actually financial literacy means understanding you're a part of society, and your financial problems are linked to the financial problems of every other person you know, and to a government and to a set of corporations that are not making it very easy to live. We did a group of workshops last year in Thunder Bay where we got our footing and figured out how to teach the course, and then we just recently went to Minneapolis and did it in a bunch of libraries. Now I think we understand more about how to make it actually work for people so they don't just leave happy, but with a set of skills and a project that would help them feel like there's some practical steps to take towards a better situation.

One thing I love about teaching these kinds of workshops is that we get to do a lot of show and tell about different social movements around the world that succeeded when people got together and decided to work on each others' behalf or stand up against different forms of austerity. It's amazing to show people who have never been exposed to social movements a little bit of what has been happening. Showing little clips of documentaries where working class folks can see people who look like them having a really good time while seeking justice on behalf of themselves and others. That's the mystical thing, that's the missing link for people, because so many North American workers never thought of themselves as potentially more than workers. Many have never thought of socializing in these other ways, and they've definitely never thought about how fun working on collective liberation could be. That's basically the secret weapon that comes at the end. People get super hyped to understand how much is possible and how much is always happening under the surface. The hard part is what you do with all that excitement. We're always looking for new groups we can partner with so there's something to sign up for, for our workshop participants. We need somebody who's going to contact them and bring them into a social movement where there's now somewhere to practice. We always refer people to the Debt Collective, which came out of Strike Debt—a giant debtor's union.

Money and exchange within project funding:

Cassie: Some of my current projects can get funded because they do somehow "register" within the art world, and I'm trying to organize how I redistribute that funding. For instance, now that I live in Canada,

I sometimes work with wealthier institutions like the Canada Council for the Arts, or Ontario Arts Council. So how can I take that money and sustain myself and also sustain my other [unfunded] collaborators and projects where I need to foot the bill and pay the workers? I need and want to support people who are not working within the art world, who don't have money, or who are un-fundable because their work is anti-capitalist, so they can afford to spend time doing radical post-work with me.

I have to constantly remember that the way that I'm valued in different situations looks different. Sometimes I'm able to actually receive money as a form of value, and then there are a lot of times when I'm not. And I would usually much rather work in the situations where I'm not able to get funding—where I'm doing something too weird, or I'm doing something that is in service of something that has such radical implications or demands that there's no possible way it's going to get funded. That might mean that I'm using funds from another project to pay someone to help me.

I started to try to think through a way that I could receive a sense of exchange from non-profit galleries when I work with them. A lot of times you do a project at a small gallery, and maybe it's the most awesome gallery and so many cool things are possible there. Maybe it's cooperatively run, anti-capitalist, or an activist space. Those places, especially in the United States, never have money, but that's where the most stuff is possible. So, what could I ask for? I don't only want money, because we're trying to build a new world with new values now, and the gallery can't afford to pay me anyway. So instead it's become my policy to ask the gallery for a favor. And my proposal is for the people surrounding the art space to try something socially-experimental with me; for example, to take phone calls with me, to set up a workshop, or to introduce me to five of their board members.

Recently I started to do this experimental form of health records keeping—a viral, anti-capitalist health project. And I thought, if places can't pay me, maybe they would help me experiment on this project. I move around so much to do projects, and I'm pretty new to Thunder Bay where I live. I don't have a big community of people to try ideas and projects out on yet. And so what I really needed was people that would be willing to try this health project with me. Maybe

they'll let me have a workshop with their workers. Or maybe they would let me work with three other people for a three month experiment. That could be happening underneath the project that is public facing, or before or after the project comes together.

If you're responsibly asking for a favor you think is within somebody else's capacity, it could be much better for them than paying you money. It opens up a conversation about value, and allows you both to discuss time and energy. If you already have the means to survive, maybe there are ways to honor your time and work without more money exchange. Just because we're used to using money as a way to show that we appreciate something, doesn't mean it is the only way. Money is not the highest form of flattery!

The Value of Poetic Labor in an Activist Context:

Zeph: What about doing work in a context where the artist is the initiator, seeking collaboration with people who have not asked for it? Before I came to grad school, a lot of my public work was very practical, very service-oriented, especially when working with activists. I'd be like, tell me what you need—I'll get the cardboard. I'll produce the visuals for you, I'll host the space and build your props. I've been very cautious about asserting my own voice as an artist in those collaborations. But it becomes an unequal exchange and I burn out.

For instance, I have a longstanding involvement in housing activism in the SF Bay Area. Here in Portland, I've been trying to make work related to housing with a more open-ended approach that includes more emotional and poetic elements. It feels clunky—I'm asking myself, what am I offering people when they step closer to the table or take my phone call or meet with me? How do I work with people who are super busy dealing with really concrete conditions around housing and policy and I'm offering them something poetic?

Cassie: I totally understand what you're saying. The one really poisonous thing (I got many good things too) that I got out of grad school was feeling like a burden when entering a space where they're doing "real work." Say you want to work with the labor union. All these organizers are working their asses off and you're like, "I want you to do this project!" The goal is to get to a point where you know that by being there, you are offering something really valuable, and that they will want to eventually have an exchange

with you—because you are an expert in what you do, you’ve done this so many times, and your labor is valuable. The kind of work that you do, Zeph, does have value. You really support people to transform their ideas, situations, and themselves by showing that something more than they realized is possible. Exchange is pretty important, because otherwise you’re in a generosity mode, or a white benevolence mode. You’re classing yourself if there isn’t exchange in some way.

All of my projects feel much better to me when I’m part of social movements at the same time. That allows me to really think strategically and collectively, what does it mean to heal? What does it mean to

create change or help somebody? I need to be grounded in a sense that I’m actually doing something before I can fuck around doing the more abstract, symbolic or aggressive work around healing or economics.

In Thunder Bay, I get a lot of energy from participating in a group called Wiindo Debwe Mosewin (formerly called the Bear Clan of Thunder Bay) which is a feminist indigenous-run project that means ‘Walks in Truth’. We do an alternative street patrol and make sure people on the street are ok. At RiVAL, we do lots to try to help people figure out how to organize or start anti-racist social movements. There are a lot of people here trying. Positive change is possible, but maintaining

the imagination of what we actually want, besides what we’re actually being offered, is pretty hard sometimes. Being in touch with other artists and keeping up with what other social movements are doing really helps keep my radical imagination alive.



Image of Desperate Holding Real Estate. Taken from the artists website.

(Dis) ○

Connectivity in Cuba: The Route of El Paquete

Aurora Rodríguez

Por mucho tiempo, la gran plaza pública cubana de medios ha sido ocupada principalmente por las fuentes estatales, que han centralizado voces diversas en coherencia con los preceptos y códigos ideológicos promovidos en el proyecto social del '59 con énfasis en mensajes políticos, informativos y educativos. Sin embargo, Cuba no está exenta de las transformaciones sustanciales que se han experimentado globalmente en el orden de las comunicaciones en los últimos años. Es por ello que el caso cubano resulta extremadamente interesante si de usos, alternativas y acceso a Internet se trata. ¿Qué es el paquete semanal? ¿Cuáles han sido las condicionantes que han generado su aparición? ¿Es un fenómeno exclusivamente cubano? ¿Podrá el paquete semanal sobrevivir la entrada de Internet a Cuba? A estas y otras interrogantes dará respuesta el presente artículo.

El punto de partida:

¿cuál fue el origen del paquete semanal?

Se dice que los cubanos son una especie humana muy particular. Y es que su particularidad comienza en esa naturaleza creativa que los caracteriza, como respuesta instintiva a la precariedad. La historia de este país de los últimos 60 años se ha visto fuertemente marcada por una escasez material que ha potenciado entre otras cosas, el valor espiritual de los nacidos en la isla y su permanente inventiva.

No se sabe realmente si el paquete semanal es un producto auténticamente cubano. Seguramente en diversas zonas con difícil acceso a la Red de Redes se podrán detectar soluciones similares. Pero de lo que si se está convencido es que el alcance y la

magnitud que tenido en todo el país, es algo que lo convierte en un fenómeno único. Para entender los por qué, se hace necesario conocer un poco de la historia, condicionantes y detonantes que distinguen esta realidad infocomunicativa.

Descifrar las particularidades del acceso a Internet, nos obliga remitirnos a circunstancias inherentes al contexto cubano: bloqueo económico de los Estados Unidos, crisis sistémica de los años '90-con fisuras aún latentes en la economía-, economía limitada con deficiencias en la producción nacional, una dependencia a la importación de productos de cualquier índole, centralización de los recursos, burocratismo, etc. provocan

que el acceso a Internet esté fuertemente condicionado por coyunturas espacio-temporales, así como por voluntades políticas.

Desde la temprana fecha de 1962, Estados Unidos ha prohibido el acceso al país de hardware y software de procedencia estadounidense. Situación que genera un encarecimiento de los dispositivos al tener que comprarlos por medio de otros proveedores. En el "Informe de Cuba contra el bloqueo" se valoraron las pérdidas causadas sólo en el período de abril 2018 a marzo 2019 de 4.343 billones de dólares. De modo que es innegable el impacto que este factor puede generar en la economía general y en especial en el renglón de las comunicaciones.



Foto por Claudio Peláez Sordo

Se produce como respuesta desde Cuba una especie de “sobredimensión de la percepción de riesgo de Internet”¹. De modo que a inicios, existió un recelo desde la alta dirección por dar pasos decisivos en la implementación de políticas de libre acceso a la red. A esta condicionante se le suma que la entrada en Cuba de las nuevas tecnologías coincidió con la profunda crisis económica de la década de 1990.

**Coordenadas para una definición:
¿Qué es el paquete semanal?**

En Cuba, según datos de la Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas e Información, sólo 257 personas de cada mil habitantes tienen acceso a Internet.² Si bien, la conectividad en Cuba ha progresado a raíz de las más recientes prestaciones ofertadas por la compañía de telecomunicaciones cubana ETECSA, con la conexión a través de redes móviles, correo móvil, wifi en distintos puntos del país, etc., la cifra de ciudadanos que acceden a Internet y a redes sociales hoy en Cuba es todavía limitada. Como también son restringidos los sitios de accesos posibles desde un “estrecho” de banda.

A la luz de estas dificultades, ha florecido de soslayo, una alternativa que figura las primitivas vías de comunicación en las que el hombre, sin depender de la tecnología, se comunicaba de forma directa, cara a cara. Es así que semanalmente se movilizan a lo largo y ancho del país, hombres y mujeres con el fin de “copiar” o distribuir al menos 1 terabyte de información compuesta por videos (Filmes HD, Filmes Cubanos, Filmes Clásicos, Videos Youtube...), música (Música Nacional, Música Internacional), programas de participación, literatura (Revistas, Libros...), clasificados de compra y venta, etc.³

“El paquete semanal es el resultado de la capacidad inventiva del cubano ante las limitaciones de acceso a internet, la ausencia de televisión por cable y de otras opciones que existen a nivel internacional para la difusión de mensajes culturales”, asegura el ex Ministro de Cultura y actual Presidente de la Casa de las Américas, Abel Prieto.⁴

El paquete resulta ser la solución semi-artesanal, momentánea y relativamente económica, ante la ausencia de una plataforma masiva que conecte a los cubanos con la información generada diariamente en la web. Una excepción en una globalidad distinguida por la conectividad, cuya esencia consiste precisamente en el intercambio de información.

Información que se compra por un



precio de 2 CUC (peso convertible cubano) y se recibe todas las semanas hasta la puerta de la casa. Un home delivery del cual los usuarios escogen y copian en su ordenador lo que consideren interesante. Las amas de casa copian sus novelas, los niños juegos de consola y los aficionados al cine logran acumular cientos de gigas de sus películas favoritas.

Aunque pocos conocen su origen real, el paquete se ha convertido en un repositorio multimedial, que cada usuario logra “customizar” de acuerdo a gustos, intereses y preferencias, a manera de comunicación a la carta, o internet “empaquetado”.

En términos mercantiles, a través de “el Paquete” se han visto favorecidos muchos negocios nacionales, debido a la utilización de este espacio, como trampolín divulgador de mensajes promocionales. En este sentido, “el Paquete” ha permitido establecer un puente de comunicación no institucional y emergente entre todos los cubanos.

En su interior residen además una suerte de “contendedores” digitales para anunciantes como “Revolic”, “Porlalibre”, “Popularísimo”, etc. en los que se ofertan una amplia gama de productos y servicios para casi todos los gustos, intereses y preferencias. De modo que esta herramienta impacta ostensiblemente en el florecimiento de una especulación interna “subterránea” a los canales oficiales de comercialización.

Y es que “el Paquete” no es un ente casuístico. Detrás de cada terabyte de información que circula, existe un grupo de hombres o mujeres, creadores y gestores que son movidos por intereses y objetivos, hasta la fecha desconocidos, debido a la conveniente nebulosa que encierra su dinámica de funcionamiento interno.

Tampoco existe información precisa sobre cuántos paquetes son distribuidos semanalmente a lo largo y ancho de todo el país. Se desconoce además quienes son sus distribuidores. Muchos se preguntan cuál será el mecanismo que utilizan para lograr

descargar 1 TB de archivos con la lenta conexión que existe en Cuba. Algunos especulan que llega directamente de los Estados Unidos. Y es que como la mayoría de los productos que circulan de forma clandestina en cualquier parte del mundo, existen “vacíos” informativos y legales que son los que permiten que dichos mecanismos continúen y sus responsables no sean identificados.

Relacionado con la definición de sus contenidos, aunque el paquete responde a una dinámica de libre flujo de la información, si se pueden trazar criterios de autocontrol de la información, de modo que ningún proveedor incluye dentro de sus “carpetas” pornografía o materiales políticamente incorrectos para evitar ser censurados o discontinuados.

Asimismo, los estudiosos del paquete semanal han logrado construir la cadena de distribución que hace posible su circulación: partiendo de los proveedores quienes reproducen la información a las matrices, quienes copian directamente a los distribuidores de primera mano, a quienes luego a su vez copiarán a pequeños distribuidores, para que finalmente llegue a manos de los consumidores.⁵

**Ahora bien:
¿por qué esta fórmula de apariencia tan simple
alcanza tal impacto?**

Primeramente, se debe partir del escenario mediático cubano que, como ya se ha mencionado, se distingue por políticas, estructuras y agendas constreñidas al aparato estatal. En la que cabe destacar la poca presencia, hasta hace algunos años, de materiales de procedencia extranjera; sin desconocer con ello, la cultura de dramatizados y filmes foráneos, que si se ha acostumbrado a transmitir por las vías formales.

Acompañando esta constricción en la distribución cultural, la parrilla de programación mediática nacional se vio también deprimida como reflejo de la desnutrición que experimentaban los presupuestos de la producción audiovisual en plena crisis. Y como resultado, el televidente cubano sólo

tenía para su esparcimiento escasos canales de televisión con programa de muy baja calidad en su confección y en algunos casos en su dramaturgia. La audiencia cubana, necesitada de una alternativa que la transportase hacia entornos completamente ajenos a los problemas que diariamente debía enfrentar, comienza a rentar por horas las antiguas cintas de video VHS, los CDs, VCDs y DVDs que contenían novelas, películas y shows latinos grabados de la “antena” (transmisiones ilegales que algunos cubanos tenían en sus casas por medio de aparatos receptores que tomaban la señal transmitida desde los Estados Unidos de televisores americanos). El paquete semanal es por tanto, una forma mutante de lo que otrora fuesen estas alternativas multimediales bien demandadas por los cubanos de a pie.

Agregar además, la poca experiencia en términos de producción y consumo de publicidad, que por política nacional hasta hace unos pocos años había sido desestimada, incluso por la academia, al considerarse una materia apegada a la ideología capitalista y consumista, ajena al proyecto socialista en construcción. No obstante, a principios de los 90, como estrategia de país para sortear la crisis económica que devino el derrumbe del campo socialista, se comenzó con discreción a coquetear con la publicidad como herramienta poderosa para el desarrollo del turismo. Actualmente, a partir de la concurrencia de nuevas formas económicas luego del VI Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba, el país se encuentra en franco despertar de las comunicaciones promocionales.

Dicha publicidad es pagada y resulta una de las formas más lucrativas del “negocio” del paquete. A raíz de la apertura del gobierno a la creación de negocios privados, numerosos cuentapropistas cubanos pagan a los creadores del paquete por anunciarse y es así que a lo largo de la gran diversidad de subcarpetas que contiene el paquete, encontrará el usuario alusión directa a una oferta concreta, bien por su colocación a finales de cada material o con cintillos insertos en

cada video. Se ha creado una especie de compañía de las comunicaciones a espaldas de la oficialidad, que en estos momentos domina el escenario publicitario cubano de forma incontrolada y con no pocos dividendos.

La garantía de éxito de “el Paquete” ha sido la posibilidad de ejercer una libertad de elección, sobre las condiciones que determinan el consumo: lugar, horario, programación, dispositivos de reproducción: móviles, ordenadores, tablets, etc., así como de los formatos: dramatizados, filmes, series, videos Youtube, entre otros.

Este medio alternativo representa además una vía mediante la cual los sujetos logran sentirse conectados con resto del mundo, para conocer temáticas de actualidad, ya sea tecnológica, musical, cinematográfica, seriada o fashionista, que le permitan ejercer un derecho elemental común a toda la humanidad: la necesidad de estar/mantenerse informado.

Y es que en efecto, la “realidad” que nos presenta “el Paquete” es muy diversa, pero también muy diferente a nuestra cotidianidad. Envíos internacionales, compras on-line, tiendas y productos para cualquier necesidad, tecnología de punta, etc. ¿Cómo no conmoverse ante “bondades” como estas, que le facilitan la existencia a muchas personas actualmente, más aún cuando muchos cubanos “subsistimos” ante disímiles carencias de tipo económica? Ante ellas, resultan increíbles las otras verdades... las de los desconectados, los sin acceso, los no personas...

El camino desandado: ¿cuál es el futuro del paquete?

¿Desaparecerá el paquete si se lograra extender el acceso a Internet en Cuba? Considerar que la muerte del paquete –si realmente fuera posible– se encuentra ligada exclusivamente al acceso liberado a la Red de Redes, es concebir a uno como el sustituto del otro, y esta es una consideración errada. De la misma forma que el paquete no pudo, ni ha podido sustituir a Internet, pensar en una suposición a la inversa, tampoco es posible.

Se habla pues de dos plataformas diferentes: Internet, medio interactivo por excelencia, que atraviesa la totalidad de las acciones de la vida cotidiana del hombre/mujer de nuestra época y desborda la función informativa que caracteriza al paquete semanal como mero repositorio y medio para el consumo multimedia. De modo que se debe hablar en vez de una sustitución de una convergencia, en la que conviven ambos medios en el basto ecosistema mediático cubano.

Al igual que el resto de las sociedades, Cuba necesita adaptarse a la convergencia sin precedentes en la experiencia socialista, que le permita avanzar en el modelo económico-social humanista en el cual se ha involucrado hace más de cinco décadas.

La gestión mediática en un escenario de convergencia supone la anuencia de procesos de hibridación y sinergia que posibiliten el acceso para la producción y consumo de contenidos en dispositivos cada vez más portátiles, interactivos y multimediales.

Continuarán quienes sigan consultando al paquete. Probablemente, en un futuro lejano o no, aparezcan otras plataformas que revolucionen las comunicaciones en todo el mundo y quizás ya no le nombremos igual, pero de seguro, existirán nuevas formas que continuarán con la larga tradición del cubano de inventar y así perseverar.

Notas:

1. Elizarde (2013) (2013) El consenso de lo posible. Principios para una política de comunicación social socialmente consistente y tecnológicamente sustentable desde la perspectiva de los periodistas cubanos. Tomado de Campos, Z. (2014) Cartografías de la Desconectividad, Tesis de Licenciatura en Comunicación Social, Facultad de Comunicación, Universidad de La Habana.
2. Tomado de Cubadebate “Escaneando el Paquete Semanal”, www.cubadebate.com
3. En la web de el Paquete (<http://paquetedecuba.com>) es posible ver una lista detallada de los archivos de cada semana divididos en carpetas y sub-carpetas.
4. Tomado de Cubadebate “Escaneando el Paquete Semanal”, www.cubadebate.com
5. Tomado de Cubadebate “Escaneando el Paquete Semanal”, www.cubadebate.com

Referentes:

- Cubadebate “Escaneando el Paquete Semanal”, www.cubadebate.com
- Campos, Z. (2014) Cartografías de la Desconectividad, Tesis de Licenciatura en Comunicación Social, Facultad de Comunicación, Universidad de La Habana.



Thumb drives, or “un dedo” are where el paquete is stored. (Photo credit. Paola Garcia/Milenio)



Hard drives being loaded with media.

(Dis)Connectivity in Cuba: The Route of El Paquete

For a long time, the Cuban media landscape has been occupied, principally, by state-run sources. These sources have centralized diverse voices in accordance with the precepts and ideological codes promoted by the social project of '59, with an emphasis on messages that are political, informative, and educational. Nonetheless, Cuba is not exempt from the substantial transformations that have been globally experienced within the realm of communications in the past few years. It is for this reason that the case in Cuba has incredibly interesting results in terms of use, access and alternatives to the internet. What is el paquete (the packet)? What have been the conditioning factors that generated its appearance? Is it an exclusively Cuban phenomenon? Will el paquete be able to survive the entrance of internet to Cuba? To these and other questions this essay will respond.

**The point of departure:
What was the origin of el paquete?**

It is said that the Cubans are a very particular species of human beings. This particularity is characterized by a type of creative nature that comes as an instinctual response to precarity. The history of this country in the last 60 years can be seen clearly marked by a material scarcity that has maximized, among other things, the creativity of those born on the island, and their continual inventiveness.

It is not really known whether el paquete is an authentically Cuban product. Surely, in diverse zones throughout the world with difficult access to the World Wide Web, one

could find similar solutions. But one for sure is the reach and magnitude that el paquete has had throughout the whole country, and this is something that turns it into a unique phenomenon. To understand the reason for this, it is important to understand a bit of the history, conditions, and triggers that have distinguished this mass-communicative reality.

To decipher the particularities of access to the Internet, we are obliged to refer back to inherent circumstances of the Cuban context: the economic blockade by the United States, the systemic crisis of the 90's (with fissures still present in the economy), an economy limited by deficiencies in national production, a dependence on importation of all kinds of products, centralizations of resources, bureaucracy, etc. These have meant that access to the internet is strongly conditioned on spatio-temporal junctions, as well as political wills.

Beginning in early 1962, the United States denied Cuba access to American hardware and software. This situation inflated the costs of devices due to the need to purchase them through third parties. According to the "Cuban report against the blockade," these losses can be valued at \$4.343 billion, and that is only in the period between April 2018 and March 2019. Therefore it is undeniable the impact that this factor has on the general economy, especially in the area of communications.

Cuba has responded to this through a type of "overemphasis of the perception of risk of the Internet".¹ Such that, at the beginning there existed suspicion from high level leadership whether to take steps towards the implementation of free access to the Internet. Added to this was the fact that the emergence of these new technologies coincided with the profound economic crisis of the 1990's.

Coordinates for a definition:

What is the el paquete?

In Cuba, according to statistics from the Office of National Statistics and Information, only 257 people per 1,000 inhabitants has access to the Internet.² While connectivity in Cuba has progressed based on the most recent plans offered by the Cuban telecommunications company ETECSA, with connections through mobile networks, email, and wifi in certain locations throughout the country, the number of citizens with access to the Internet and social networks today is still limited. Additionally, many sites are restricted or limited by a "small" bandwidth.

In light of all these difficulties, an alternative has flourished, utilizing primitive forms of communication through which people, without having to depend on technology, can communicate directly, face to face. Every week, through the length and breadth of the country, men and women mobilize to "copy" or distribute no less than 1 terabyte of information, composed of videos (HD films, Cuban films, classic films, Youtube Videos...), music (National music, international music), correspondence courses, literature (reviews, books...), classifieds for sale and purchase, and more.³

"The weekly packet is the result of the inventive capacity of Cubans before the limitations to internet access, the absence of cable television and other options that exist at the international level for the diffusion of cultural content," asserts the ex-Minister of Culture, and current President of the Casa de las Americas, Abel Preito.⁴

El paquete winds up being a solution—semi-artisanal, momentary, and relatively economic—to the absence of a large scale platform that connects Cubans to the information that is generated daily on the Internet. It is an exception within a globality distinguished by connectivity, whose essence consists precisely in the exchange of information.

El paquete is information. Information that you buy for 2 CUC (about 2 USD) and receive every week at the doorstep of your house. A home delivery from which users select and copy whatever they think is interesting onto their computers. Housewives copy their soaps, kids copy video games, and film buffs wind up accumulating hundreds of gigabytes of their favorite films.

Although few know the real origin, el paquete has become a multimedia repository, that each user winds up "customizing" according to their likes, interests, and preferences, but in a format similar to a letter, or a "packaged" internet.

By means of “el paquete,” national businesses are able to benefit, thanks to the utilization of this space as a trampoline for spreading promotional materials. In this sense, el paquete has allowed the establishment of a non-institutional form of communication, emergent between all Cubans.

Inside, there is also a kind of digital “container” for advertisers such as “Revolico”, “Portalibre”, “Popularisimo”, etc. in which a wide range of products and services are offered for almost all tastes, interests and preferences. This tool ostensibly impacts the growth of an underground speculation that operates outside of the official channels of commerce.

And it’s not that el paquete is something disingenuous. Behind every terabyte of information that circulates, exists a group of men and women, creators and consumers, that are motivated by interests and goals to use el paquete, for who knows how long, owing to the nebulous and opaque nature of its internal functioning.

Neither does there exist precise information about how many packets are distributed weekly across the country. It is also unknown who are the distributors who import the content. Many people wonder, what might be the device that allows them to download over 1 terabyte of archives and information with the slow connections that exist in Cuba? Some speculate that the connection comes directly from the United States. And just like most products that circulate in a clandestine manner in any part of the world, there exists a legal and informational void that allows these mechanisms to continue, and their stewards to remain anonymous.

Related to the understanding of its content, although el paquete responds to a dynamic of free-flowing information, one can trace elements of self-control and censorship. For example, no provider includes in their “folders” pornography or politically incorrect material, in order to avoid being censured or discontinued.

Likewise, the remarkable people that manage el paquete have achieved the construction of a chain of distribution that

allows its circulation: beginning with the providers that reproduce information for the networks, those who copy directly to the first hand distributors, to those who later copy the information to the smaller distributors, so that they can finally arrive in the hands of the consumer.⁵

**And now:
How does such a simple formula
create such an incredible impact?**

Firstly, one should state that the media landscape in Cuba, which as has already been mentioned, is distinguished by politics, structures, and agendas that are constrained by the state apparatus. It is possible to emphasize the small presence, until some years ago, of foreign media; but without ignoring it, the culture of foreign films and dramas has slowly begun to be broadcast through formal channels.

Accompanying this constriction in cultural distribution, the broader national media programming is also viewed as lagging, and as a reflection of the clear crisis and lack of budget for audiovisual production. And as a result, Cuban television only broadcasts a few channels of very low quality programming in terms of production, and sometimes in terms of acting. The Cuban audience, in need of an alternative that would transport it to completely foreign environments, away from the daily problems it faced, began to rent (by the hour) old VHS, CDs, VCDs, and DVDs that contained soaps, movies, and latin shows picked up by “the antenna” (illegal transmissions that some Cubans had in their houses through receivers that picked up transmissions from television stations in the United States). The weekly packet is therefore a mutant form of the multimedia alternatives that were once in high demand by Cubans.

In addition, there is little experience in terms of production and consumption of advertising, which by national policy until a few years ago had been dismissed, even by the academy, because it was considered a subject attached to capitalist and consumerist ideologies, outside the socialist project. However, in the early 90s, as a strategy to escape from the economic turmoil that came with the fall of socialism abroad, the state began to play with advertising as a way to begin developing tourism. In actuality, beginning with the concurrence of new economic forms of the 11th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, the country is having a great awakening to mass-marketing and advertising.

This publicity is paid for, and results as

one of the most lucrative forms of “business” within el paquete. Beginning with the opening, by the government, of the creation of private businesses, numerous self-employed Cubans began to pay the creators of el paquete to include advertisements. Within the great diversity of sub-folders that exist within el paquete, one will find direct links to bargain offers, either through their addition at the end of films, or their insertion through banners within each video. This has created a special type of advertising company, with its back to official channels, which at this moment dominates the publicity landscape in a form that is uncontrollable and highly profitable.

The recipe for success of el paquete has been the possibility to exercise a freedom of choice upon the conditions that determine consumption: place, schedule, programming, and methods of reproduction: phone, computer, tablet, etc. As well as formats: dramas, films, series, Youtube videos and others.

This alternative media represents a mediated channel which allows its subjects to feel connected to the rest of the world, to know and understand current issues, whether they relate to technology, music, film, series or fashion, and which lets them exercise a fundamental human right: the necessity to stay informed. The reality that is presented through el paquete is very diverse, but also very different from our daily life. International messages, online shopping, stores and products for whatever need, cutting edge technology... How can one not be affected by these “benefits”, which enable the daily lives of many people? Especially when so many Cubans “subsist” with incredible economic inequities. In the context of the “benefits,” these other truths become incredible... those of the disconnected, without access, the non-persons.

**The backwards path:
What is the future of el paquete?**

Will el paquete disappear if access to the internet is extended to all of Cuba? To consider that the death of el paquete—if it really is possible—would be encountered exclusively connected to free access to the World Wide Web, is to conceive of el paquete as simply a substitute for the internet, and this concept is wrong. In the same way that el paquete could never be eliminated, it is impossible to think of the inverse—of the Internet being fully substituted by el paquete.

We are talking about two different platforms: the Internet, interactive media par excellence, which covers the totality of actions within the daily lives of people in



our era, would flood the informational function capacity of el paquete, which serves as a mere repository and means for multimedia consumption. We must speak instead of a convergence rather than a substitution, in which both platforms coexist in the vast Cuban media ecosystem.

In the same manner as other societies have done, Cuba needs to adapt to this convergence (without precedent in the socialist experience), that permits it to advance within the humanist socio-economic model that it has been participating in for more than five decades. The management of this media landscape within a framework of convergence requires the consent to processes of hybridization and synergy that allow access for the production and consumption of content in increasingly portable, interactive and multimedia devices.

El paquete will continue on by those who seek to consult it. Probably, in a future far away, other platforms will appear that will revolutionize communications across the world, and perhaps we won't think of it equally anymore. But there will always exist new forms that will continue the long Cuban tradition of inventing and persevering.

Notes:

1. Elizarde (2013) (2013) El consenso de lo posible. Principios para una política de comunicación social socialmente consistente y tecnológicamente sustentable desde la perspectiva de los periodistas cubanos. Tomado de Campos, Z. (2014) Cartografías de la Desconectividad, Tesis de Licenciatura en Comunicación Social, Facultad de Comunicación, Universidad de La Habana.
2. Taken from Cubadebate "Escaneando el Paquete Semanal", www.cubadebate.cu
3. From the website Paquete (<http://paquetedecuba.com>) it is possible to see a detailed list of the archives from each week, divided into folders and sub folders.
4. Taken from Cubadebate "Escaneando el Paquete Semanal", www.cubadebate.cu
5. Taken from Cubadebate "Escaneando el Paquete Semanal", www.cubadebate.cu

References:

- Cubadebate "Escaneando el Paquete Semanal", www.cubadebate.cu
- Campos, Z. (2014) Cartografías de la Desconectividad, Tesis de Licenciatura en Comunicación Social, Facultad de Comunicación, Universidad de La Habana.

Liminal: Neurons and Nebulas

Alex Borgen



“You have an impressive amount of activity from both sides of your brain,” the neurofeedback scientist told me, “But it doesn’t seem to be conversing fluently from one side to the other. You must feel quite a bit of friction with your thoughts and desires. Your brain map shows both an intensely analytical and also highly intuitive emotional landscape. This protocol should get both halves of your brain to communicate.” I was in the second month of a 4-month full-time out-patient treatment program for severe anxiety and chronic panic attacks. More generally, I had an intense nervous system responses to stimuli.

The neurofeedback I received was a system used to get the brainwaves back in sync, control the “high-alert” brain waves and re-teach my nervous system to stay in more calming wave activity. About an hour a day, I watched a visualization of my brain activity across a screen as low droning sounds played through my headphones. These sounds and visualizations were at the frequency geared for deep relaxation and nervous system healing. The other 7 hours of the day were spent in meditation, yoga, group Dialectic Behavior talk therapy, and individual talk therapy. I specifically chose a program using somatics, biofeedback, and brain-wave science, to halt my nervous system from responding in such an acute manner because the talk therapy I had been doing for years, just wasn’t working. I chose a therapy that provided scientifically documented results in re-wiring the brain. It was total coincidence that the treatment center was only a 5 mile mountain bike ride on single track over the pass from my house.

The neurofeedback center was located just off one of the two major highways paralleling the canyon-lands of Southern California. While none of southern California can really be called rural, the trailer park I called home was perched in the sag of the Santa Monica mountain range. My community was made up of horse ranchers and Hollywood movie stars. The Santa Monicas felt wild cropping up between Highway 101 and Highway 1 along the coast. The doublewide was surrounded by Ponderosa pines, and I fell asleep each night smelling sage and agave blossoms. I listened to the frogs whistle and croak in the natural spring that divided my trailer from my neighbor’s. My conversations meandered fluidly between the old days of cattle ranching and complimenting the nail color du jour, depending on the person.

While living in California, somewhere amidst the ocean waves coming to shore, the book I was writing, the art residencies I wasn’t getting, the brain wave reconfiguration, the jagged sounds of a dualistic landscape, and the art workshops I couldn’t fill, I decided to begin taking science classes in order to pursue a different career—medicine.

My body feels electric, fluid, and expansive under a canopy of artificial sky. My new friend, a fellow mountain biker and artist, and I are laying on the floor, under one of my installation pieces. Imagine a 20 foot by 14 foot giant sheet of dark blue

handmade paper that resembles a thick, creased swath of fabric. The installation is meant to be seen from above and below—climb under it like a blanket fort. Informed by living in the dense city of Chicago during graduate school, below the worn paper is a galaxy—the paper blanket is pinpricked with thousands of holes and ambient light shines through them, resembling a starry night in the mountains—an artificial analog sky.

I feel an emotional and physical shift every time I venture into this work. It's been a while since I've been immersed in it, and my friend points out that the inconsistencies of the paper remind him of the milky way or other nebulas that he has seen on NASA's "Image of the Day" website. I want him to feel transformed. Instead, he talks about neon lights, armatures, and technical aspects of creating a new version of this work. He focuses on facts surrounding the process of the work and the science behind what the work might represent.

The corpus collosum is a thick band of nerve fibers spanning the divide between the two hemispheres of the brain within the interhemispheric fissure. The main function of this fiber bundle is to allow the right and left hemispheres to communicate and process sensory and visual information coming into the brains from opposite sides of the body. Each side of the brain performs some specific functions, and these regional specializations are not usually found in the other half of the brain. The right cerebral hemisphere analyzes spatial and visual information, relates the body to its environment, and analyzes emotions and facial expressions. The left side is usually the site for language, writing, mathematical calculation, speech, and other tasks associated with process and logic. Sometimes, words are found elsewhere. The hemispheric lateralization may account for certain brain dominance and account for traits and skills, and the commissural fibers within the corpus collosum allows the brain to coordinate and communicate across the divide.

A high percentage of left-handers are artists, possibly indicating a link with right brain dominance, left-handedness, and art. It is said that scientists are predominantly "left brained" while artists are "right brained." While hemisphere dominance remains in conventional conversation, actual studies seem to be lacking specific evidence indicating such dominance, and the malleability of the brain to rewire itself (such as in people with damage to a specific location) demonstrates a much more sophisticated network within the brain.

My new friend and I don't know each other very well, and yet we find ourselves under the star blanket after two conversations—

We exchanged a series of text messages about art in the weeks after we met. He sent me pictures of his recent bike-painting project. “And what does that graphic shape represent to you?” I asked. “Well, that’s the problem, I just struggle explaining what I want to say about my work; I really like process and utility, hence loving ceramics.” We continued to text about art versus craft. Then, I shifted, writing, “every artist has something to say, and it’s about finding the right words to describe the concepts, and how to connect the dots between interesting topics and the work one makes.”

Later, when we hanging out in person, he explained to me his interest in the growing field of collecting scientific data around personality traits. He explained that personality tests such as Myers-Briggs are not necessarily wrong, but they are oversimplified, as in people can have different personalities within the same personality type. These tests also don’t account for the malleability of how we see ourselves depending on external factors. Such as, if you recently get a new job with certain skills you assume that you are great at that skillset all the particular time, and it would skew the personal data you provide for that personality test. We see ourselves in the moment. Furthermore, how we see ourselves is different than others might see us. He talked extensively in his interest in the data to explain both how and why people are who we are, and how it can be useful to understand yourself and those around you. “Scientific data might be able to show how much personality is tied to nature versus nurture, maybe even generations back,” he said. I asked if he had an opinion of how the field of epigenetics plays a role in personality. I mentioned a study about several generations of mice, whose genetics changed due to stressful situations scientists put on the first generation, then asked if he wanted to see my art.

Maybe I am like water, more fluid than solid. I spread and shape into various schematics and ideations. How do they see me? “I work in abstraction, too,” I should have told him, “and I’m fascinated by the phenomenological human experience and becoming the terrain that sustains us.” Instead, I made him crawl under a giant sheet of paper, one that suspends disbelief and shifts boundaries into seemingly limitless horizons.

I was reminded of a night in Oregon, where, after my anatomy and physiology class, I biked up a single-track trail with my sleeping bag to spend the night in the mountains. I saw a wide sky that cascaded layers of stars in my view. I came here to feel vastness. I imagined my future shattered into a million webs of being. I can see myself so vividly living a million different versions of myself.

Bios:

Alex Borgen is an interdisciplinary artist who uses text, performance, and audio in conceptual projects. She is interested in the importance of transitional or liminal spaces—conceptual, physical, and temporal—and how we move through our landscapes and experience place from multiple points of view. She is the 2016 recipient of the Emerging Writer's Award in *Panorama: Journal of Intelligent Travel*, the 2012 Chicago Newberry Library's bibliophilic Caxton Club Scholarship, and the 2012 Nakane Aiko Award, among others. She has shown her work, published, and taught creative workshops nationally and internationally, and she earned her MFA from Columbia College Chicago's Interdisciplinary Arts Department.

A.K. Burns is a filmmaker, artist and educator based in New York. Burns is currently focused on completing *Negative Space* is a cycle of four multi-channel video installations that takes science fiction as a point of departure. The opening episode, *A Smeary Spot* debuted at Participant Inc., NY in 2015, followed by *Living Room* in 2017 at the New Museum, NY. In 2019 the third work *Leave No Trace*, premiered at the Julia Stoschek Collection in Dusseldorf, Germany and the work was produced with the support of EMPAC at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York.

Spencer Byrne-Seres is an interdisciplinary artist, arts administrator, and educator who creates experimental platforms for art and public research. He has taught sculpture and Foundations as an adjunct instructor at Portland State University, combining extensive experience in sculptural processes, social practice, and exhibitions making. As the Exhibitions Director at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, he supports a year round visual arts program and facilitates large scale artist projects and site specific installations. As an artist, Spencer creates public projects in school cafeterias, fish hatcheries and libraries. Over the past three years, he has co-developed an Artist Residency program within a minimum security men's prison in Northeast Portland, in order to support the work of currently incarcerated artists.

Rebecca Copper (b.1989) is an interdisciplinary artist that explores the space between symbolic and experiential, dialogical art. She is interested in using dialogue as a medium to shape experiences and as a way to explore collective learning processes. Deeply influenced by the ideas of Fluxus, bell hooks, and writings like the *Society of the Spectacle*, she supports blurring of art and life while removing hierarchical boundaries that keep art inaccessible. Rebecca has

worked with people living in hospice, living under incarceration, as well as youth in some of her socially engaged art projects. She is currently in her first year as an MFA candidate at PSU's Art and Social Practice Program and is a fellow through the Columbus Printed Arts fellowship. She received her BA from Otterbein University, where she focused on darkroom photography and experimental time-based media of which she pursues alongside her social practice.

Emma Duehr is an interdisciplinary artist who builds environments for community healing, empowerment, and education. Her work facilitates discussions, collaborations, and creativity using the worldwide web, educational settings, and city sidewalks. Her work is a platform for intimate exchange through gardening, craft, and dialogue. Emma is the creator of *Talking Tushies*; an ongoing international public art performance advocating for survivors of sexual violence. Duehr is based in Portland, Oregon and is pursuing her MFA in Art and Social Practice at Portland State University.

Zeph Fishlyn (pronouns they/them) is a multidisciplinary visual artist dedicated to personal and collective storytelling as nonlinear tools for reinventing our world. Zeph's participatory projects, drawings, objects and installations nurture alternative narratives by questioning, dreaming, distorting, celebrating and demanding. Their most recent work explores absurdity, embodiment, intimacy and playfulness as sources of resilience and creative subterfuge. Zeph is also a serial collaborator with grassroots groups focused on social and economic justice and LGBTQ liberation. Zeph is an MFA Candidate in the Art and Social Practice program of Portland State University.

Emily Fitzgerald is a creative consultant, socially-engaged artist, photographer, and storyteller. Through her consulting and art practice she focuses on integrating the relational and visual to elevate engagement, invoke curiosity, and demonstrate multi-dimensionality. Her work is responsive, participatory, and site-specific—seeking to shift systems of power, and build meaningful connection. Emily brings large-scale art installations into non-traditional, public and unexpected places in order to deepen our understanding, reframe our ways of relating to one another. In addition to creative consulting, Emily teaches Art and Human-Centered Design at Portland State University. Tia Kramer is a social choreographer, site specific performance artist, and educator interested in everyday gestures of human connection. Through her projects she create experiences that prioritize empathy and engage

participants in collective self reflection. Community and connection are both the source and the purpose of her creative work. Her collaborations and practice cultivate equity, empathy and mindfulness in the world.

Shelbie Loomis is a socially engaged artist, who focuses her time and efforts on socio-economic research and creates participatory artwork with subculture social groups such as the travelers, full-time RVers, intellectual precariat, immigrants, and union workforce. She has worked with communities through murals with *Keeping Santa Fe Beautiful*, sat on the New Mexico Professional Business Women of Santa Fe executive board which involves themselves with legislation for equal opportunity for jobs and education for women, and as of Fall 2019 has moved to Portland to work on her MFA at Portland State University in Art + Social Practice.

Eric John Olson is an artist, technologist, and educator. His work explores systems of power and their relationship to lived experiences through interdisciplinary and socially engaged art practices. Olson is an MFA candidate at Portland State University in the Art & Social Practice program and holds a degree in Computer Science. He has worked with technology in a variety of capacities and currently designs systems at scale leveraging AI as a Software Architect. Olson's art has been supported by the Seattle Art Museum OSP Residency, MadArt Studios, Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Eichholz Foundation, 4Culture, The Seattle Public Library Foundation, and other arts and civic organizations. His projects have been written about in *The Seattle Times*, *CityArts Magazine*, *Vice Magazine*, *The Stranger*, and others.

Aurora Rodríguez tiene su master en Ciencias de la Comunicación. Experiencia profesional como profesora e investigadora en la Facultad de Comunicación de la Universidad de La Habana, Cuba. Especialista en estudios de Comunicación Corporativa, Comunicación Hipermedia, Visibilidad, Posicionamiento y Analítica Web. Participación en eventos nacionales e internacionales en el campo de la comunicación y las ciencias sociales: Lasa 2016, ICOM 2017, Coloquio de Estética y Arte 2018, entre otros. Aurora Rodríguez has her masters in Communication Sciences. She has experience as a professors and researcher within the faculty of the University of Havana, Cuba. She specializes in Corporate Communications, Hypermedia, Visibility, Position and Analytic Web. She has participated in events nationally and internationally in communications and social sciences: Lasa 2016, ICOM 2017, Coloquio de Estética y Arte 2018, among others.

Roshani Thakore is an artist at the Asian Pacific Network of Oregon (APANO). She launched the East Portland Art and Justice Lab to explore the intersection of art and social justice with the staff, residents, and local community members. Stop by the lab at 8118 SE Division St, Portland, OR 97206!

Cassie Thornton is an artist and activist who makes a "safe space" for the unknown, for disobedience and for unanticipated collectivity. She uses social practices including institutional critique, insurgent architecture, and "healing modalities" like hypnosis and yoga to find soft spots in the hard surfaces of capitalist life. Cassie has invented a grassroots alternative credit reporting service for the survivors of gentrification, has hypnotized hedge fund managers, has finger-painted with the grime found inside banks, has donated cursed paintings to profiteering bankers, and has taught feminist economics to yogis (and vice versa). She has worked in close collaboration with freelance curators and producers including Taraneh Fazeli, Magdalena Jadwiga Härtelova, Dani Admiss, Amanda Nudelman, Misha Rabinovich, Caitlin Foley and Laurel Ptak. Her projects, invited and uninvited, have appeared at (or in collaboration with) *Transmediale Festival for Media Arts*, *San Francisco MoMA*, *West Den Haag*, *Moneylab*, *Swissnex San Francisco*, *Pro Arts Gallery & Commons*, *Dream Farm Commons*, *Furtherfield*, *Gallery 400*, *Strike Debt Bay Area*, *Red Bull Detroit*, *Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts*, *Flux Factory*, *Bemis Center for the Arts*, *Berliner Gazette* and more.

David Wilson is an artist based in Oakland, CA, creating observational drawings in the landscape and organizing things. Currently he is involved as a guest artist at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Send something to: BAMPFA Art Lab 2120 Oxford St, Berkeley, CA 94720 and you will start to receive print projects in the mail.

Illia Yakovenko is a precarious cultural worker, artist, curator, poet, spectator, and a self-proclaimed Ukrainian cultural ambassador to Portland, OR. As an artist, Illia reexamines historical, social, economic, and political conditions of art production, the role of art in state policies, and the impact it has on our histories, memories, cultures, identities by means of collective art production. Before coming to Portland in 2019 to pursue an MFA in Art and Social Practice at PSU, Illia had lived and worked between Kiev and Kyiv, Ukraine.

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EXCHANGE

Featuring essays and interviews by: Alex Borgen, A.K. Burns, Rebecca Copper, Emma Duehr, Zeph Fishlyn, Emily Fitzgerald, Shelbie Loomis, Aurora Rodriguez, Roshani Thakore and David Wilson, Cassie Thornton.

Exchange is the transfer of something between two individuals, animals, cultures, or entities. Exchange can be the basis for communication, commerce, education, and art. It can be commodified, or abstract. Literal, emotional, or metaphysical. We looked into various socially engaged practices and explored how artists and non-artists alike use forms of exchange within their work.

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