CULTURAL PILGRIMAGES AND METAPHORIC JOURNEYS

Suzanne Lacy

Artists and writers throughout the continent are currently involved in a . . . redefinition of our continental topography. We imagine either a map of the Americas without borders, a map turned upside down, or one in which . . . borders are organically drawn by geography, culture, and immigration, not by the capricious fingers of economic domination.

—*Guillermo Gómez-Peña*

For the past three or so decades visual artists of varying backgrounds and perspectives have been working in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility. Dealing with some of the most profound issues of our time—toxic waste, race relations, homelessness, aging, gang warfare, and cultural identity—a group of visual artists has developed distinct models for an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language. The source of these artworks' structure is not exclusively visual or political information, but rather an internal necessity perceived by the artist in collaboration with his or her audience.

We might describe this as "new genre public art," to distinguish it in both form and intention from what has been called "public art"—a term used for the past twenty-five years to describe sculpture and installations sited in public places. Unlike much of what has heretofore been called public art, new genre public art—visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives—is based on engagement. (As artist Jo Hanson suggests, "Much of what has been called public art might better be defined as private indulgence. Inherently public art is social intervention.")[1] The term "new genre" has been used since the

late sixties to describe art that departs from traditional boundaries of media. Not specifically painting, sculpture, or film, for example, new genre art might include combinations of different media. Installations, performances, conceptual art, and mixed-media art, for example, fall into the new genre category, a catchall term for experimentation in both form and content. Attacking boundaries, new genre *public* artists draw on ideas from vanguard forms, but they add a developed sensibility about audience, social strategy, and effectiveness that is unique to visual art as we know it today.

Although not often included in discussions about public art, such artists adopt "public" as their operative concept and quest. According to critic Patricia C. Phillips, "In spite of the many signs of retreat and withdrawal, most people remain in need of and even desirous of an invigorated, active idea of public. But what the contemporary polis will be is inconclusive." This indeterminacy has developed as a major theme in new genre public art. The nature of audience—in traditional art taken to be just about everyone—is now being rigorously investigated in practice and theory. Is "public" a qualifying description of place, ownership, or access? Is it a subject, or a characteristic of the particular audience? Does it explain the intentions of the artist or the interests of the audience? The inclusion of the public connects theories of art to the broader population: what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may *itself* become the artwork.

Whether or not this work is "art" may be the central question to some. Modernist assumptions about art's necessary disengagement from "the masses" die hard, although multiple examples during the past twenty or more years imply deep interaction between "high art" and popular culture. During the seventies, for instance, Lowell Darling ran for governor of the state of California, in a performance that won him almost sixty thousand votes in the primaries. At the same time Judith F. Baca intervened in gang warfare in East Los Angeles with her mural project *Mi Abuelita.* Appropriated, performative, conceptual, transient, and even interactive art are all accepted by art world critics as long as there appears to be no real possibility of social change. The underlying aversion to art that claims to

"do" something, that does not subordinate function to craft, presents a resonant dilemma for new genre public artists. That their work intends to affect and transform is taken by its detractors as evidence that it is not art. As we will see in this book, however, the issues raised by this work are much more profound for the field of art than such reductivism implies.

ALTERNATIVE CARTOGRAPHY: PUBLIC ART'S HISTORIES

Depending on how one begins the record, public art has a history as ancient as cave painting or as recent as the Art in Public Places Program of the National Endowment for the Arts. While no overview has been agreed upon yet, a quasi-official history of recent public art in the United States can be tracked through commissions, distribution of percent-for-art moneys, articles, conferences, and panel discussions. But with history as well as maps, the construction of meaning depends on who is doing the making.

Art in Public Places

One version of history, then, begins with the demise of what Judith Baca calls the "cannon in the park" idea of public art—the display of sculptures glorifying a version of national history that excluded large segments of the population. The cannon in the park was encroached upon by the world of high art in the sixties, when the outdoors, particularly in urban areas, came to be seen as a potential new exhibition space for art previously found in galleries, museums, and private collections. In the most cynical view, the impetus was to expand the market for sculpture, and this included patronage from corporations. The ability of art to enhance public spaces such as plazas, parks, and corporate headquarters was quickly recognized as a way to revitalize inner cities, which were beginning to collapse under the burden of increasing social problems. Art in public places was seen as a means of reclaiming and humanizing the urban environment.

For all intents and purposes, the contemporary activity in public art dates from the establishment of the Art in Public Places Program at the National Endowment for the Arts in 1967 and the subsequent formation of state and city percent-for-art programs.[2] Governmental funding seemed

to promise democratic participation and to promote public rather than private interests. These goals were nominally achieved by selection panels of arts and civic representatives appointed by the mayor, who, "as the representative of all the people," was initially enlisted to authorize NEA applications. The late sixties and early seventies were the era of the civic art collection that related more to art history than to city or cultural history, and which fulfilled the NEA goal "to give the public access to the best art of our time outside museum walls." These works, which were commissioned from maquettes and closely resembled smaller-scale versions in collections, moved the private viewing experience of the museum outdoors. Festivals, rallies, or other plaza gatherings were supplemental to the art, but were not communal activities integral to it. Because these works were art monuments indicative of the author's personal manner of working, not cultural monuments symbolic of contemporary society, the ensuing public debate centered on artistic style (e.g., abstract versus figurative art) rather than on public values.

Throughout the seventies administrators and arts activists lobbied for percent-for-art programs, and these, combined with NEA grants and private sector money, fueled public art. The size of commissions created a viable alternative to the gallery system for some artists. In time, and partly because of the pressure to explain the work to an increasingly demanding public, a new breed of arts administrator emerged to smooth the way between artists, trained in modernist strategies of individualism and innovation, and the various representatives of the public sector. Collaboration with other professionals, research, and consultative interaction with civic groups and communities became more common, and teams of artists, architects, designers, and administrators were formed. Except in unusual circumstances, the full creative and cooperative potential of such teams rarely materialized.

More commissions and scrutiny brought further bureaucratization in what curator Patricia Fuller has identified as "the public art establishment . . . [with] an increasing tendency toward complication and rigidification of processes, the codification of a genre called public art, [and] ideas of professionalism which admit artists and administrators to the

fraternity. This all seems to have created an apparatus which can only be justified by the creation of permanent objects."

According to Fuller, early in the seventies some artists and administrators in the field began to differentiate between "public art"—a sculpture in a public space—and "art in public places," a focus on the location or space for the art. Beginning in 1974, the NEA stressed that the work should also be "appropriate to the immediate site," and by 1978 applicants were encouraged "to approach creatively the wide range of possibilities for art in public situations."[3] The NEA encouraged proposals that integrated art into the site and that moved beyond the monumental steel object-off-the-pedestal to adopt any permanent media, including earthworks, environmental art, and nontraditional media such as artificial lights.

Some artists saw public art as an opportunity to command the entire canvas, as it were, to allow them to operate with a singular and uncompromised vision. Site-specific art, as such art in public places began to be called, was commissioned and designed for a particular space, taking into account the physical and visual qualities of the site. As site became a key element in public art, the mechanisms by which works were commissioned also required revision.[4] Therefore, in the eighties the NEA tried to promote the artist's direct participation in the choice and planning of the site. By 1982 the Visual Arts and Design programs had joined forces to encourage "the interaction of visual artists and design professionals through the exploration and development of new collaborative models."

Scott Burton, one of the most recognized public artists in this period, believed that "what architecture or design or public art have in common is their social function or content. . . . Probably the culminating form of public art will be some kind of social planning, just as earthworks are leading us to a new notion of art as landscape architecture."[5] Eventually, as the practice matured, artists turned their attention to the historical, ecological, and sociological aspects of the site, although usually only metaphorically, and without engaging audiences in a way markedly different from in a museum.

By the late eighties public art had become a recognizable field. Conferences were held, and a small body of literature, dealing for the most

part with bureaucratic and administrative issues, considered the complexities of the interface between visual artists and the public.[6] NEA guidelines of 1979 had called for a demonstration of "methods to insure an informed community response to the project."[7] This directive was extended in 1983 to include planning activities "to educate and prepare the community" and "plans for community involvement, preparation, and dialogue." By the beginning of the nineties, the NEA encouraged "educational activities which invite community involvement."[8]

At the same time, the economic downturn, deepening urban troubles, and a new distrust of art led to attacks on public art and its funding sources. Provocative situations marked the last years of the eighties, most notably the controversy surrounding Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, when office workers' demands to remove the sculpture from its site in a civic plaza led to calls for greater public accountability by artists. As the conventions of artistic expression continued to come into conflict with public opinion, the presentation of an artist's plans to community groups became de rigueur. This in turn compelled a greater reliance on the intermediary skills of the public arts administrator, since social interaction was neither the forte nor the particular aesthetic interest of many established public artists. Thus skills were differentiated, and artists were able to maintain an aesthetic stance apart from notions of public education.

From the beginning, public art has been nurtured by its association with various institutions and, by extension, the art market. Although the move to exhibit art in public places was a progressive one, the majority of artists accommodated themselves to the established museum system, continuing to focus their attention on art critics and museum-going connoisseurs. The didactic aspects of art were relegated to the museum education department. "What too many artists did was to parachute into a place and displace it with art," comments Jeff Kelley. "Site specificity was really more like the imposition of a kind of disembodied museum zone onto what already had been very meaningful and present before that, which was the place."

In recent years, artists, administrators, and critics alike have looked at this progression from objects in museums, to objects in public places, to

site-specific installations and have framed present social and political artworks within the context of this essentially formalist movement. They have understood the emergence of collaborative notions in art as a reflection of "design teams," modeled after architectural practices. (Most public artists who developed within the preceding historical progression have worked closely with landscape architects, designers, and architects.) However, it is the premise of this book that an alternative reading of the history of the past thirty years results in a different interpretation of these same present concerns. Indeed, many of the artists listed in the compendium of this book had been working for years outside the purview of the accepted public art and art in public places narrative, dominated as it was by sculpture. Artists as diverse as Allan Kaprow, Anna Halprin, and Hans Haacke in the sixties and Lynn Hershman, Judy Chicago, Adrian Piper, and Judith Baca in the seventies were operating under different assumptions and aesthetic visions. Not easily classifiable within a discourse dominated by objects, their work was considered under other rubrics, such as political, performance, or media art; hence the broader implications for both art and society were unexplored by art criticism.

Art in the Public Interest[9]

An alternative history of today's public art could be read through the development of various vanguard groups, such as feminist, ethnic, Marxist, and media artists and other activists. They have a common interest in leftist politics, social activism, redefined audiences, relevance for communities (particularly marginalized ones), and collaborative methodology. By re-visioning history through the lens of these interests, rather than artistic media-specific concerns, we understand the present moment, new genre public art, and its implications for art making in a way that focuses our critical investigation.

We might begin in the late fifties, when artists challenged the conventions of galleries and museums through Happenings and other experiments with what was to become known as popular culture. Allan Kaprow has recounted his version of that history. The artists "appropriated the

real environment and not the studio, garbage and not fine paints and marble. They incorporated technologies that hadn't been used in art. They incorporated behavior, the weather, ecology, and political issues. In short, the dialogue moved from knowing more and more about what art was to wondering about what life was, the meaning of life."

Over the next decades popular culture, which included the media and its mass audience, became more attractive to artists. In the seventies artists such as Chris Burden, Ant Farm, Lowell Darling, Leslie Labowitz, and myself interrupted television broadcast programming with performances (Shu Lea Cheang later called them "media break-ins"). During the subsequent decade, media-related art was more analytic than activist, but the relative availability of media and its possibilities of scale encouraged artists to think more critically about audiences. The relationship between mass culture, media, and engaged art was recognized by Lynn Hershman: "The images and values of the culture that produces the [television] programs invade the subconscious cultural identity of its viewers. It's essential that the dialogue becomes two-way and interactive, respects and invites multiple points of view."

The connection between an activist view of culture and new genre public art had been forged during the Vietnam War protests of the late sixties by U.S. artists who were in turn influenced by political activists.[10] At the same moment, also drawing from the radical nature of the times, women artists on the West Coast, led by Judy Chicago, developed feminist art education programs.[11] Activist art grew out of the general militancy of the era, and identity politics was part of it. Women and ethnic artists began to consider their identities—key to the new political analysis—central to their aesthetic in some as yet undefined manner. Both groups began with a consciousness of their community of origin as their primary audience.

Ethnic artists such as Judith Baca worked in ghettos and barrios with specific constituencies, struggling to bring together their often highly developed art-school aesthetic with the aesthetics of their own cultures. Emphasizing their roles as communicators, these artists drew upon their heritage for an art language, such as public murals, that would speak to their people. Their work reflected this bridging of European and ethnic

cultures, and they became particularly adept at translation and cultural critique. Almost invariably this led to activism. According to Yolanda López, "In an era when the state has disintegrated to the degree where it can no longer attend to the needs of the people, artists who work in the community need to consciously develop organizing and critical skills among the people with whom they work." For this they were called "community artists," and critics refused to take their work seriously.

"The personal is political" was the koan of the feminist art movement, meaning that personal revelation, through art, could be a political tool. The seventies brought a high degree of visibility to women's issues. Feminist art, based in activism, grew out of a theoretical framework provided by Judy Chicago, the most visible feminist artist from that era, along with others including Miriam Schapiro, Arlene Raven, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Mary Beth Edelson, June Wayne, and Lucy Lippard. Chicago thought that the suppression of an empowered female identity through popular culture's misrepresentations could be counteracted by articulate identity constructions in art. In this way, art making was connected both to a broad public and to action.

Moving into the public sector through the use of public space, including the media, was inevitable for artists who sought to inform and change. Because of their activist origin, feminist artists were concerned with questions of effectiveness. They had fairly sophisticated conceptions of the nature of an expanded audience, including how to reach it, support its passage through new and often difficult material, and assess its transformation or change as a result of the work. Seeing art as a neutral meeting ground for people of different backgrounds, feminists in the seventies attempted artistic crossovers among races and classes. Collaboration was a valued practice of infinitely varying possibilities, one that highlighted the relational aspects of art. By the end of the seventies feminists had formulated precise activist strategies and aesthetic criteria for their art.

Though their art was not based in identity politics, other political artists were working during the seventies. Marxist artists in particular used photography and text to portray and analyze labor. They interacted with the audience by interviewing workers, constructing collective narratives,

and exhibiting those narratives within the labor community. Their analysis extended to a critique of art and its markets as well and was exhibited in museums and art magazines. For the most part, the theoretical aspects of this work were more developed than its activism until the mid-eighties, and while the work's analysis was comprehensive, it often didn't attempt actual change. Martha Rosler and Fred Lonidier, however, are among several whose work was interactive from the beginning.

Throughout the seventies, considerable but often unacknowledged exchange occurred among ethnic, feminist, and Marxist artists, particularly on the West Coast, making it difficult to attribute ideas to one group or another. That people were simultaneously members of more than one group also accounted for cross-influences. It is safe to say, however, that working during the same decade and within earshot of each other, these artists reached similar conclusions from different vantage points, and these conclusions about the nature of art as communication and the articulation of specific audiences form the basis for new genre public art.

Recent History: Calls to Action

This construction of a history of new genre public art is not built on a typology of materials, spaces, or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention. It is my premise that the real heritage of the current moment in public art came from the discourses of largely marginalized artists. However visible the above cited "movements" were, they were not linked to each other, to a centralized art discourse, or to public art itself until the late eighties. Four factors conspired to narrow the distance between our two historical narratives and bring about an interest in a more public art.

First, increased racial discrimination and violence were part of the eighties conservative backlash. As immigration swelled the ranks of ethnic populations, their new political power and articulate spokespeople brought ethnicity to the attention, if not the agenda, of the U.S. public. The introduction of diversity raised profound questions about culture itself. Visual artists, participating in international artistic and literary ex-

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changes, expressed the shifts in cultural expectations of people of color throughout the world. "What if," mused Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "our internationalism was no longer defined by New York, Paris, Berlin, or even Mexico City but . . . between San Antonio and Bangkok?" "The geographical is political" became the new koan of political artists.

A second factor in the political conservatism of the eighties and early nineties was the attempt to circumscribe the gains women had made during the previous decades. Antiabortion forces gathered momentum as an increasingly conservative Supreme Court threatened constitutional attacks on abortion rights. Several events, including Anita Hill's testimony on sexual harassment at the televised hearings for Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court nomination, reignited a national discussion of women's rights. In the nineties artists were once again working with issues of gender violence, echoing feminist artists of the seventies, but this time the makers included both men and women.

Not surprisingly, given the political climate, the end of the eighties saw an exercise in cultural censorship on a scale not known since the fifties. This third factor is closely linked to the first two. Censorship efforts of politicians in league with conservative fundamentalists targeted women, ethnic, and homosexual artists. The attacks made abundantly clear the connections between the rights of these social groups and those of artists in general, evoking an almost unilateral response from the art world. These attacks on publicly visible artworks, most of which were temporary or photographic (but also included Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*), created a lasting and chilling influence on public art.

Finally, interest in new forms of public art was provoked by deepening health and ecological crises. Concerned about AIDS, pollution, and environmental destruction, artists began looking for strategies to raise awareness. Artists with AIDS brought the disease into the gallery, literally and figuratively, and AIDS activists staged street actions inspired by performance art of the sixties and seventies. Environmental crises were the subject of artworks in diverse media, including photo-texts, paintings, installations, and performances.

Although in theory new genre public art might be made by those at either end of the political spectrum, both the history of avant-garde forms upon which it draws and the social background of those attracted to its practice effectively position this work as liberal or radical. The issues just cited—opposition to racism, violence against women, censorship, AIDS, and ecological damage, for example—are as much a recounting of a traditional leftist agenda as they are the subject matter of new genre public art.

Within the ranks of the artists who have contributed to this alternative public art history are several who, having predicted the current social and aesthetic situation in their work, have created their own road maps. Concerned with issues of race, gender, sexuality, ecology, and urbanization, for twenty years in some cases, their theoretical perspectives and activist strategies were well developed. These artists, most of whom are included in the compendium, were quickly held up by members of the "official" public art establishment as models for a new form of public art. Unfortunately, this sporadic recognition and the failure to understand the history of these artists' concerns and influences have disassociated them from their radical heritage. This dismemberment has allowed us to continue along a critical "blind path" without coherent theories uniting aesthetic, personal, and political goals. This book, in attempting to reframe an extensive body of work, suggests that new genre public art is not only about subject matter, and not only about placement or site for art, but about the aesthetic expression of activated value systems. "The new public art is not so much a movement of the nineties, a new way of working, as a way of working that has found its time," reflects independent curator Mary Jane Jacob.

EXPLORING THE TERRITORY IN QUESTION

The stage is set. Enter the various players, each with a different history but with similar social concerns that lead to a unique and identifiable aesthetic language. This book attempts to throw a spotlight on the work of new genre public artists with the goal of developing a critical dialogue. The essays and the entries in the compendium provide a multivocal over-

view of the territory in question. From the discussion among artists and critics at the "Mapping the Terrain" retreat emerge the following related themes—of social analysis and artists' roles, responsibilities, and relationships with audiences—that may contribute to a formal language for this type of public art.

Social Analysis and Democratic Processes

We are living in a state of emergency. . . . Our lives are framed by a sinister kind of Bermuda Triangle, the parameters of which are AIDS, recession, and political violence. I feel that more than ever we must step outside of the strictly art arena. It is not enough to make art.

—Guillermo Gómez-Peña

References to the broader context of political and social life are never far from the works of new genre public artists. Their artworks reflect varying degrees of urgency, but all see the fate of the world as what is at stake. "I feel a great urgency in my own work to address the issues of our destruction and not to make works of art that keep our society dormant" (Juana Alicia, muralist). In one form or another, social theories are linked closely with the making of this art, and their expression is taken as the prerogative of the artist as well as of the curator and critic.

Some artists emphasize Otherness, marginalization, and oppression; others analyze the impact of technology. Some draw from the ecology movement or from theories of popular culture. As might be expected, feminist and racial politics are evident. Art's potential role in maintaining, enhancing, creating, and challenging privilege is an underlying theme. Power relationships are exposed in the very process of creating, from news making to art making. "We need to find ways not to educate audiences for art but to build structures that share the power inherent in making culture with as many people as possible. How can we change the disposition of exclusiveness that lies at the heart of cultural life in the United States?" (Lynn Sowder, independent curator).

Seeking consensus seems to be at the core of these artists' works. As critic and activist Lucy Lippard suggests, the Eurocentric view of the

world is crumbling: "Nothing that does not include the voices of people of color, women, lesbians, and gays can be considered inclusive, universal, or healing. To find the whole we must know and respect all the parts."

The idealism inherent in this work is reflected in an inclusive uniting of issues and concerns. As artists Estella Conwill Májozo and Houston Conwill stated in presenting their work with collaborator Joseph De Pace, "We . . . address issues of world peace, human rights, rights of the physically challenged, democracy, memory, cultural diversity, pro-choice, ecology, and caring . . . and the common enemies of war, hatred, racism, classism, censorship, drug addiction, ageism, apartheid, homophobia, hunger, poverty, joblessness, pollution, homelessness, AIDS, greed, imperialism, cross-cultural blindness, and fear of the Other." Given the litany of social ills that are the subjects of this work, there is remarkably little despair or cynicism. Optimism is a common response, although tempered with political realism.

One question such working modes generate is how to evaluate the artist's choice of subjects and social analysis. Is work that, for example, deconstructs media coverage of the "Desert Storm" war in Iraq automatically laudable because of its particular position on war, technology, or media? Is the sophistication of its analysis, in this case its media theory, a measurable aspect of the work?

Internal and External Transformation: The Artist's Responsibility

Implicit or explicit in the artists' references to a larger social agenda is their desire for a more connected role for artists. The distance placed between artists and the rest of society is part of their social critique. "What I find myself thinking about most these days is the isolation of artists from our culture. It seems that as society declines both economically and socially there's an even stronger need for the kind of humanism and creativity of artists' works. Paradoxically, artists are more spurned and discounted than ever" (Jennifer Dowley, director, Visual Arts Program, National Endowment for the Arts). The longing for a centralized position, however,

is often countered by the artist's conflicting desire to remain outside as a social critic.

"Public art in the Eurocentric cultures has served the value systems and the purposes of an unbroken history of patriarchal dominance that has despoiled the earth and its inhabitants and seriously threatens the future. Responsible social intervention must hold up a different image. It must advance other value systems" (Jo Hanson, public and installation artist). The question is, whose value systems? The definition of what constitutes beneficial intervention by artists and how responsibility is expressed in aesthetic terms is in part a consideration of artists' intentions. A less obvious relationship is between the artist's interiority and the making of a work. The conversation about the psychological, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of this work is still superficial, halted by a focus on its more overt political aspects. Yet more than a few artists temper their reformatory zeal with an understanding that an internalized agenda is being externalized through their art.

The fallibility of our own conceptions of "good" for others presents an ongoing dilemma for new genre public artists. "Fritz Perls calls responsibility 'response-ability,' the ability to respond. He considers 'obligation' a synonym for 'megalomania,'" performance artist John Malpede says. "Your responsibility is your ability to respond to your own needs." A resolution of the ethical dilemma inherent in political proselytizing is to consider the impulse to respond in the context of self.

Allan Kaprow strikes a balance between internal and external necessity. "It's not only the transformation of the public consciousness that we are interested in, but it's our own transformation as artists that's just as important. Perhaps a corollary is that community change can't take place unless it's transformative within us. That familiar line—'I see the enemy and it is I'—means that every prejudice, every misunderstanding that we perceive out in the real world is inside of us, and has to be challenged." This philosophical positioning of "self" in the context of culture is an unexamined characteristic of this work, along with how its structural, temporal, and iconographic nature is shaped by the artists' psychological processes.

Continuity and Responsibility

The strong personal relationships forged through new genre public art are often maintained by the artists over time and distance. Part of their humanistic style, this characteristic has obvious political implications for continuing and enhancing the changes set in motion by the work. When Malpede works with the homeless in cities other than his hometown of Los Angeles, for example, he may link them to local activists and artists in the process of creating a performance. "When we work in other communities, I feel like one thing we can offer to local artists is how to maintain the work after we leave, logistically speaking."

The notion of sustaining or continuing a connection begun through the artwork is an expression of personal responsibility that has a pedagogical thrust, often expressed as educating engaged community members, students, or even the art world. This pedagogy is rarely as doctrinaire as its critics would have it. Rather, the artist imparts options for developing activist and aesthetic work, generally on the constituency's own terms. According to Malpede, "We can offer an aesthetic structure they can transform and carry on. Some community artists get involved and have a completely different aesthetic agenda than our own, and then it's 'Good! Do that!' It's really important that people have a strong artistic vision. It doesn't have to be congruent with ours."

If the artist does have stated political intentions—and the overtness of these varies from artist to artist—then continuity may be a measure of both the artist's responsibility and the work's success. "It has to be sustained. You can't have a flash in the pan and expect that's going to change things" (Judith Baca). The issue of continuity, and time in general, is a crucial one for new public art, taxing the resources of a funding and support system built around time-limited installations and exhibitions in controllable spaces.

The emotional and physical demands on artists are high in this labor-intensive work. The financial costs of developing the work over an extended time and of continuing contacts after the piece is finished are rarely built into budgets, and artists who work in regions outside their

own are faced with perplexing questions. Some resolve them by working locally within their communities; others build relationships that accommodate the distance.

Collaborative Practice: Notions of Public and Private

"Whatever I did publicly I was thinking of at least one person in the general public to whom my work would speak" (Leopoldo Maler, Argentinian installation and performance artist). All art posits a space between the artist and the perceiver of the work, traditionally filled with the art object. In new genre public art, that space is filled with the relationship between artist and audience, prioritized in the artist's working strategies.

For some, the relationship *is* the artwork. This premise calls for a radically different set of skills. For example, "juxtaposition" as an aesthetic practice may mean, in this case, bringing together diverse people within the structure of the work, exploring similarities and differences as part of a dialogic practice. Building a constituency might have as much to do with how the artist envisions the overall shape and texture of a work as it does with simply developing an audience.

These approaches become part of the artist's expanded repertoire. "We can't do works without talking with people in the site. We do a tremendous amount of talking to people in the communities we work in . . . and it's a transformative experience. It transforms the work and it transforms us" (Houston Conwill). This process of communication describes not only a way of gathering information but of conceptualizing and representing the artist's formal concerns. The voices of others speak through this artwork, often literally. Of her project in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sheila de Bretteville says, "It matters to me that their names and the dates on which they said it are there, because they're speaking and I'm not mediating their speech. I'm not interpreting it. I'm simply gathering it and giving it form for others."

The skills needed for this relational work are communicative in nature, a stretch for the imaginations of artists and critics used to the monologic and studio-based model of art. Suzi Gablik calls for an art "that

is more empathic and interactive and comes from a gentle, diffused mode of listening . . . a kind of art that cannot be fully realized through monologue. It can only come into its own in dialogue, in open conversation in which one is obliged to listen and include other voices."

The transition from a model of individual authorship to one of collective relationship suggested in this work is not undertaken simply as an exercise in political correctness. A longing for the Other runs as a deep stream through most of these artists' works, a desire for connection that is part of the creative endeavor in all its forms. Estella Conwill Májozo considers the blues a structural model for her art, the goal of which is to link African American history to current community. "In blues, I find the notion of twinning, of connection with the Other, and find, in the search, that the perceived two are one at the end."

This relational model, whether expressed psychologically or politically, draws upon a spiritual tradition in art. Many new genre public artists express their connection, through memory, to traditions of ethnicity, gender, or family. They talk about their habitation of the earth as a relationship with it and all beings that live there. These essentially ethical and religious assertions are founded on a sense of service and a need to overcome the dualism of a separate self. That dilemma is played out not only between self and Other but between perceived public and private components of the artist's self. "I think this sense of what it means to be a social persona and the fact that every social person has a private person inside is vital to the sense of community and to any meaningful sense of 'public'—of public service. The way to get to those issues sometimes is organizational and structural, but often it has to do with compassion, with play, with touching the inner self in every individual who recognizes that the next individual has a similar self. And it is that community, whether literal or metaphorical, that is in fact the real public that we as artists might address" (Kaprow).

Engaging Multiple Audiences

Empathy begins with the self reaching out to another self, an underlying dynamic of feeling that becomes the source of activism. Whether or not

one wants to discard the model of isolated authorship (and I personally do not), it is certainly not the only possible alternative for visual artists. The work of these artists suggests that another fundamental premise is being constructed—that creative works can be a representation of or an actual manifestation of relationship. A very significant relationship is between the artist and his or her audience.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the work in question is the factoring of the audience into the actual construction of the work. This work activates the viewer—creating a participant, even a collaborator. It might be said that all art takes its audience into account, even if only in the subconscious mind of the artist working for some imaginary Other. One traditional notion of late modern art suggests that if this is true, it is not something one ought to admit—as if making art for anyone other than oneself is a failure of the imagination. The makeup of the audience for art was not heretofore scrutinized, but was assumed to be largely white, middle-class, and knowledgeable in contemporary art. Artists worked for each other, a select few critics, and potential buyers.

Given the desire for relationship with the Other, it was inevitable that the audience would become increasingly prominent as this form of public art developed. "Where before the audience was prepared through various museum programs in order to like the work of public art, or such a work was left for a time to soften the blow so that reactions to it were mediated in some way . . . in this truly public art the audience is very much engaged, from the start, in the process of making" (Jacob).

As one begins to articulate forms of actual rather than metaphorical engagement, one must come to terms with exactly whom one is speaking to. "When she abandons certain mythologies of public in order to create new ones, the artist cannot be dismissive about the realities of place" (Patricia Phillips). Potential audiences are real people found in real places. Bearing witness to an identifiable person or group challenges the monolithic image of the audience that has been enshrined in the value systems and criticism of late modern art.

If the audience is no longer a given, neither is it singular. Artists are beginning to conceive of complex and multiple audiences as distinct

groups, including integral participants, occasional viewers, and the art world itself. The content of the artwork defines its audience groupings, as does the venue. These influences are reciprocal, with choices of venues affecting the content as well, amounting to a more fluid and process-oriented approach.

"Who is the public now that it has changed color?" asks Judith Baca. The single most explosive idea to the myth of a coherent and generalized art audience has come from the recognition of difference. "An earlier heroic and modernist idea of public art suppressed the significant differences, while looking for some sort of normative and central idea of public. The big question for public artists and for critics is, how do we develop a public art that acknowledges and supports and enriches these differences while at the same time discovering how these differences contribute to an idea of public life that is, in fact, a kind of common ground?" (Phillips).

Ethnic minorities have challenged the assumptions of culture premised in the work of European, primarily male artists, as have feminists, whose theory of differences has effectively demonstrated the patterns of dominance deeply embedded in the language and symbols of representation. "In the future, whose idea of beauty and order will be in public spaces? That is perhaps the greatest question we have to face. You can look at a landscape and you can see it as perfect in itself. Or you can look at it as undeveloped land. Those are two very different points of view. Who will make the public art in that space?" (Baca).

The road to reconciling differences is not as straightforward as we might have thought ten years ago. "We're still working on dismantling all those old binary oppositions and the differences between the center and the edge. All those centers and all those margins are really parts of a very large framework of centers and margins together. We get community without unity, without understanding, accepting all the different parts without having to really understand everything, because there are some places where we truly can't" (Sheila de Bretteville).

Ambiguity and paradox resonate within this artwork, recognized by the artists through their active participation in the realities of community. Differences, whether reconciled or simply tolerated, must be accom-

modated somehow within the artwork. "We all have multiple identities, and that's how we cope with things. To take any of us as simply a two-dimensional system is to not really understand. We all have distinct backgrounds but a common foreground" (Peter Jemison, curator and theorist).

Negotiating the complicated field introduced by the destruction of a unified art audience is tricky. Where and how the artist locates her voice within the work's structure is critical, as is the representation of the community voice. What if there is disagreement? This practical question figures significantly in art censorship controversies and is at the heart of new genre public art. "One of the big challenges that we're going to have to figure out in this country and in democracy is the role of individuals and communities—individuals and their freedom and communities and their rights, or standards. How do we make those two things come together in some way that still allows us to be very different but live together?" (David Mendoza, executive director, National Campaign for Freedom of Expression).

New Roles for Artists

Integrity is based not on artists' allegiances to their own visions but on an integration of their ideas with those of the community. The presence of a diversified audience in these works leads us back to issues of power, privilege, and the authority to claim the territory of representation. Inevitably, then, we must reconsider the possible "uses" of artwork in the social context and the roles of the artist as an actor in the public sector.

In finding new ways to work, artists have drawn on models outside the arts to reinterpret their roles. Allan Kaprow called attention to the inherently pedagogical nature of art in a series of articles in the seventies called "The Education of the Un-Artist."[12] Artist as educator is a construction that follows from political intentions. "If art is to ever play a role in the construction of shared social experience, it must reexamine its pedagogical assumptions, reframing strategy and aesthetics in terms of teaching" (Richard Bolton, writer and artist).

This was well understood by Judy Chicago and other feminist artists of the seventies, whose ideas about art were developed from an examination of issues of authority, representation, historical revision, and

the pedagogical effects of public disclosure on political systems. As the audiences for women's art became more populist, mandated by the breadth of the artists' aspirations for change, the discursive aspects of the work became as urgent as the aesthetic. Media appearances, classes, exhibitions, discussion groups, public demonstrations, consultations, and writings were all developed as integral to the artwork, not as separate activities. "When the artist designs the program as well as the work of art—or shall I say when the artistic strategies become one with the educational events, we have a new way of thinking about the purpose of the work. The process that involves all of these activities needs to be recognized as the central part of the work of art. We're not just talking about a final product to which all else is preliminary. The artist him- or herself as a spokesperson is a very different kind of role" (Jacob).

A more thorough analysis of the various claims artists make for redefining their roles is needed to keep from substituting one set of mythologies for another. Some ideas clarify and others simply confuse. "Maybe this generation is unloading the myth of the artist, the myth of immediate gratification, of genius and superiority and entering the more real space of disappointments, of slow processes that need to be undertaken before something can be changed" (Kaprow).

In recent literature and at symposiums, many suggestions for redefining roles have been put forward. Yolanda López invokes a model of citizenship: "Exercising the social contract between the citizen and the state, the artist works as citizen within the intimate spaces of community life." Helen Mayer Harrison suggests, "We artists are myth makers, and we participate with everybody else in the social construction of reality." In a fanciful flight of metaphor, Guillermo Gómez-Peña suggests that artists are "media pirates, border crossers, cultural negotiators, and community healers." These metaphorical references drawn from outside the arts propose a different construction of visual arts practice and audience. When "public" begins to figure prominently in the art-making equation, the staging area for art becomes potentially any place—from newspapers to public restrooms, from shopping malls to the sky. These expansive venues allow not only a broader reach but ultimately a more integrated role for the artist in society.

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CRITICISM OF NEW GENRE PUBLIC ART

At this date there seem to be more questions than answers, more rhetoric than inquiry. Criticism flounders with outmoded and unexamined constructions, far outstripped by artists' ongoing investigations. It is time to do more than describe this artwork, time to look more closely at what exists within the borders of this new artistic territory.

How do we begin pulling together the various strands of new genre public art, much of the thinking about which is located within the artists' own practice and writing? First, we must analyze the work in a more challenging and complex fashion. I suggest the following areas as a beginning construct: the quality of the imagery, including the question of beauty and the relevance of invention; the artist's intention and the effects of the work, whether measurable or hypothesized; and the work's method of conveying meaning. As a preface, the roles of the curator and critic must be considered with respect to this work.

Curators, Critics, and Artists as Collaborators

"As a curator, I do become involved in the creative process. The curator becomes a collaborator, a sounding board, and ultimately a facilitator. It's very important to play a role of giving permission, if you will, that anything is possible while we're thinking about how to create a work" (Jacob). Critics and curators who work with new genre public artists actively participate in the ethos and assumptions of the art. They see themselves as contextualizing and expanding the artist's reach.

Whether she works inside or outside of institutions, the curator presents and promotes the artwork to the art world and the culture at large. Increasingly, curators align themselves with the artists' visions for expansive audiences. "I'd like to build bridges, linkages between what artists are thinking and doing to our daily lives. I'd like to provide our culture with access to the ideas of artists, to pursue situations where artists can reengage as part of the mainstream discourse, where they can participate as citizens. I'd like to explore situations where artists are activators, articulators, and legitimate participants in the community, not offering

benedictions or accusations from the sidelines" (Dowley). With aspirations such as these, curators support the artists' belief that visual art can play a larger role in setting the public agenda.

In addition, some curators, having worked for years with artists of this genre, have either adopted artists' educational and outreach strategies or arrived at the same point following a similar analytic process. Experimenting with presentational venues and curatorial styles, they serve as educators for the profession as well as for lay audiences, even initiating younger artists into interactive modes. They facilitate opportunities for artists to work within the community by contacting community groups, arranging resources, and planning informational and educational activities. Notable projects in the past few years have adopted the models inherent in earlier public artworks, with curators taking on roles formerly assumed by artists. The Spoleto Festival USA exhibition and Sculpture Chicago's *Culture in Action*, both curated by Mary Jane Jacob, and Lynn Sowder's *Women's Work: A Project of Liz Claiborne, Inc.* are examples of expanded projects in which the curator envisions and coordinates extensive public media and artistic approaches to themes and issues.

The critic provides the written context that expands the artwork's potential meanings, explains it to different audiences, and relates it to the history and contemporary practices of art. "The critic's role is to spread the word, propagate ideas, conceptualize, and network publicly with artists. We're mediums. And we need to help find complex and diverse ways to connect the private and the public, the personal and the political" (Lucy Lippard). The critic evaluates, describing the standards by which the work will be measured and pointing out flaws in thinking. Their scrutiny is vital, as it is too easy to simply applaud the work's social intentions at the price of its aesthetics or, conversely, to ignore them.

The critical task is not an easy one, as we have tended to separate our political and aesthetic language in this country since the ascendancy of formalist criticism in the forties. "It seems to me that arriving at some sort of a model [for criticism] involves getting past this bifurcation between the aesthetic and the social. There's a whole there; someone has to figure out how to negotiate the territory, because this dualism just doesn't explain the

work" (Patricia Fuller). Often functions between the disciplines overlap—artists and curators write critically; critics and curators work collaboratively with artists; critics curate; and artists curate others' artworks as part of a larger work they author. New genre public art calls for an integrative critical language through which values, ethics, and social responsibility can be discussed in terms of art.

The Question of Beauty and the Relevance of Invention

The discussion of beauty, invention, and the artful manipulation and assembling of media need not be excluded from the consideration of work that represents values and is contextualized within the public. Such separation is divisive, at best an overreaction to conventional and confining notions of beauty, and at worst an excuse to dismiss out of hand a large body of contemporary art.

Carol Becker, in an essay on the education of artists, quotes James Hillman's description of experiencing beauty as "this quick intake of breath, this little *hshshs* the Japanese draw between their teeth when they see something beautiful in a garden—this *ahahah* reaction is the aesthetic response just as certain, inevitable, objective and ubiquitous as wincing in pain and moaning in pleasure."[13] We recognize this gasp of recognition, a recognition at once of the newly invented and the already known.

The problem of beauty in the artworks considered in this book is a legacy of the dematerialization of art and the development of conceptual and performance art forms during the sixties—how do we as visual artists judge the beauty in ideation or temporal shape? Frustrated, some critics simply abandon the territory, leaving beauty to the domain of materialized and media-specific constructions. Interestingly, the interrogation of notions of beauty through, for example, certain deconstructive work of the eighties is more institutionalized within art criticism than is the implication, often inherent in new genre public art, of non-museum-oriented forms of beauty. That is, a critique of beauty is acceptable as long as the current language of art is maintained and the makeup of the art audience is not actually challenged.

The role of invention in beauty is more complex, especially within an art world driven by novelty. Our reward system, based on the appearance of innovation, often leads us to deny the work of intellectual and spiritual predecessors, unless they are long enough dead that association with them enhances rather than competes. This hysteria for the new, a prejudice of our society, has reached a climax in contemporary art. The implications for building a sustained and effective argument for art's social role are severe if activist artists cannot acknowledge how they are building on each other's works and theories.

And yet, in spite of the political uses to which notions of invention are put, in a very real sense beauty—the *ahahah* experience—results from reassembling meaning in a way that, at that moment, appears *new* and unique to the perceiver. This paradox must be grappled with in new genre public art: the desire for what has not been seen and the politically isolating demand for originality. The perception of beauty, subject as it is to cultural training and political manipulation, is still a necessary aspect of human existence. The quality of imagery and use of materials, including time and interaction, must be included in critical analysis of new genre public art.

Artists' Intentions and Effects

Another dilemma for criticism is what relationship evaluative criteria should have to the artist's expression of intentionality. Assumptions about authorship, beauty, and what constitutes a successful work might change with an understanding of artists' theoretical constructions, and some knowledge of their intentions seems necessary if one is to understand fully. For example, Judith Baca suggests two working models that might result in different critical treatments: "In some productions where you are going for the power of the image, you can get a large amount of input from the community before the actual making of the image, then you take control of the aesthetic. That's one model. Another is a fully collaborative process in which you give the voice to the community and they make the image. Both of these processes are completely valid, but there's very little room for the second because artists take such huge risks becoming associated

with a process that might not end up as a beautiful object. The confusion is massive when you talk to people who are writing about it; whose art is it, the kids, the homeless, or yours?"

Can we trust the artist's claims for the work? Some critics have suggested that the distance between the artist's political intentions and real social change is the only criterion. This idea reflects the dualistic conundrum at the heart of critical thinking about this work—is it art or is it social work? Methods traditionally used to measure change, drawn from the political or social sciences, are never, to my knowledge, actually applied. The language for doing so is not in place, and even if it were, we are reluctant to reduce our critical evaluation to one of numbers, or even, for that matter, to personal testimonies. Concrete results in the public sphere, and how these reflect the artist's intentions, may occasionally be illustrative of a work's success but fall short, as they do not capture all the varied levels on which art operates.

Art and Meaning

By leaning too far in the direction of evaluating the work's social claims, critics avoid giving equal consideration to its aesthetic goals. Our current critical language has a difficult time coming to terms with any process art. Yet as Jeff Kelley states, "Processes are also metaphors. They are powerful containers of meaning. You have to have people [critics] who can evaluate the qualities of a process, just as they evaluate the qualities of a product. There's a false dichotomy that's always talked about, even by us, between objects and processes. Any time we objectify consciousness, it's an object in a sense, a body of meaning. Looking at a product at the end, or looking only at the social good intentions or effectiveness of the work is certainly not the whole picture."

As variable as the individual perceptions of meaning may be, at least this terrain is a familiar one to art criticism—social meaning as it is embodied in symbolic acts. "Part of what we're doing is to dream. [An artist] is not changing the homeless problem. How many million homeless are there in the world? How many people is that one artist working with? No, this

is an issue about identity and history" (Alf Lohr, German critic and artist). Whether the art operates as a concrete agent of change or functions in the world of symbolism (and how such symbolism will affect actual behavior) is a question that must inform a more complex critical approach.

Even when the artist's intentions are to evoke rather than merely to suggest social transformation, the question of whether art operates differently than, say, direct action must be considered. Why does this work assume the position, "shape," and context of art? If indeed it does, one of the evaluative sites must be the meaning to its audience, a meaning not necessarily accessible by direct query.

Perhaps, in the end, the merit of a single and particular work in and of itself will not be the sole concern of our criticism. If new genre public artists are envisioning a new form of society—a shared project with others who are not artists, working in different manners and places—then the artwork must be seen with respect to that vision and assessed in part by its relationship to the collective social proposition to which it subscribes. That is, art becomes one's statement of values as well as a reflection of a mode of seeing.

In a public art dialogue focused on the bureaucratic and the structural, the visionary potential of public art, its ability to generate social meaning, is lost. Inherent in seeing where we are going is asking why we are going there. If in *Mapping the Terrain* we reframe the field within which this artwork operates, reuniting it with its radical heritage and the artists' ethical intentions, then perhaps our understanding of this art will be redirected along a different road.

Whether it operates as symbolic gesture or concrete action, new genre public art must be evaluated in a multifaceted way to account for its impact not only on action but on consciousness, not only on others but on the artists themselves, and not only on other artists' practices but on the definition of art. Central to this evaluation is a redefinition that may well challenge the nature of art as we know it, art not primarily as a product but as a process of value finding, a set of philosophies, an ethical action, and an aspect of a larger sociocultural agenda.

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This essay appeared in a slightly different form in *Public Art Review*, Spring/Summer 1993 and Summer/Fall 1993.

1. Unattributed quotations are drawn from transcripts of the symposium "Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art" sponsored by the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1991.

2. The balance of this paragraph is drawn from Mary Jane Jacob's essay "Outside the Loop," *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. *Design Quarterly*, no. 122 (1983).

6. One such series of conferences sponsored by the NEA resulted in a book, *Going Public: A Field Guide to Developments in Art and Public Places*, published by the Arts Extension Service in cooperation with the Visual Arts Program of the NEA. It was written by Jeffrey L. Cruickshank and Pam Korza.

7. Jacobs, "Outside the Loop."

8. The title of the program was changed twice, reflecting shifts in the field, changing from Art in Public Places to the current Visual Artists' Public Projects. Each change suggested a growing awareness of the roles and results of art in a public setting. "What has changed recently," asserts Bert Kubli, program officer of the NEA, "is the necessity to have a conversation with the audience in the public space and a renewed focus on the artist."

9. This phrase is drawn from Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

10. See Lucy Lippard, *A Different War: Vietnam in Art* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1990).

11. Judy Chicago pioneered feminist art education at California State University in Fresno, California, in 1969. Between 1970 and 1972 she brought her program to the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia with painter Miriam Schapiro, and in 1973 she expanded it at the Feminist Studio Workshop with designer Sheila de Bretteville and art historian Arlene Raven. Feminist art education, as Chicago and her colleagues conceived it, was dramatically different from most art education at the time. Its goal was to help students identify personal subject matter and produce "content-oriented artworks" that reached a broad audience.

12. Allan Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I," *Art News* 69, no. 10 (1971), pp. 28–31; "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II," *Art News* 71, no. 3 (1972), pp. 34–39; and "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III," *Art in America* 62, no. 1 (1974), pp. 85–89.

13. James Hillman, "The Repression of Beauty," *Tema Celeste* 4, no. 31, international edition (1991), pp. 58–64, quoted in Carol Becker, "The Education of Young Artists and the Issue of Audience," in *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Henry Giroux (New York: Routledge, 1994).