Three Rivers Arts Festival

points

of

entry

Three Rivers

ARTS

JUNE 7–23, 1996
PITTSBURGH

Festival

Pittsburgh is like a big fort. Geographically it's bound by a highway which goes all around the city. So before you get to Pittsburgh you can't see it. Usually you can see a city five or ten minutes before you arrive–but not here. It's very separating.

Once I made drawings of the paths people look through downtown on their lunch hours. I would sketch these little maps to see if there was any important shape or hidden meaning in the routes people took.

Part of my experience is that some of my family lived in the city so I grew up half there and half in the suburbs–and there's a big difference between them. In the city you can get away with so much more, there's less cops and so many people just hanging out on the street corners. The ratio of cops to kids is high...they watch you nonstop. The city cops don't care what you do because they got bigger things to deal with. The city represents a lot more freedom, an in-between place where you can get away with things out in the open you wouldn't do in the suburbs.

You know the problems in big cities today–how people go out and live in the suburbs and never come back. They come here 9 to 5 but they don't come in on the weekends and this draws them back. Festivals are what every city wants to do so for citizenry will realize the city is a good place to live and have a good time, not just a place for work. It changes downtown. It's obviously valuable to the human condition, but also in terms of money for the city. When they come they spend downtown: they have to park, they go to stores, they go to McDonald's. Think about it, we spread out all over so they're going to walk all over downtown–the exposure is great. The city knows. Believe me, the city knows it.

Program guide

The quotations and underlying images running throughout the program guide were compiled by Group Material as our contribution to this year's public art component of the Three Rivers Arts Festival, *Points of Entry: A Community Based Public Art Project*. We have integrated the Festival's schedules and information with a constructed 'dialogue' from interviews conducted spontaneously on the street, during a radio call-in program, and from scheduled discussions in homes and offices. Several excerpts are reproduced from previous writings by architects, critics and designers. All texts are represented anonymously to de-emphasize attributes normally used to categorize identity—such as location of residency or institutional affiliation—and instead highlight actual statements.

The questions we raised with interviewees were largely about their experience using the city, neighborhoods and public spaces, recent relevant changes, personal and collective histories, functions of urban festivals and the cultural, corporate, and consumer entities that administrate, support and visit such events. The linked fragments can be read as a textual chain that was not conducted as a dialogue in real time, but should convey a logic of interconnectedness between topics.

As 'community' and 'public' are amorphous terms, it is crucial to question the ideological underpinnings and context as well as the character of social constellations at work when they are invoked. Given recent trends toward professionalization of community-based art alongside privatization of public space, we decided to investigate 'community' as a term in relation to the Festival itself.

Our project is not a sociological or scientific survey, nor is it a random sampling of Pittsburgh residents and there is no pretense of objectivity here. The overarching goal of the project is to introduce unarticulated perspectives and voices into the official festival arena and to construct a picture of 'community' and 'the city' as indeterminate and contested by introducing unexpected observations, critiques and agendas.
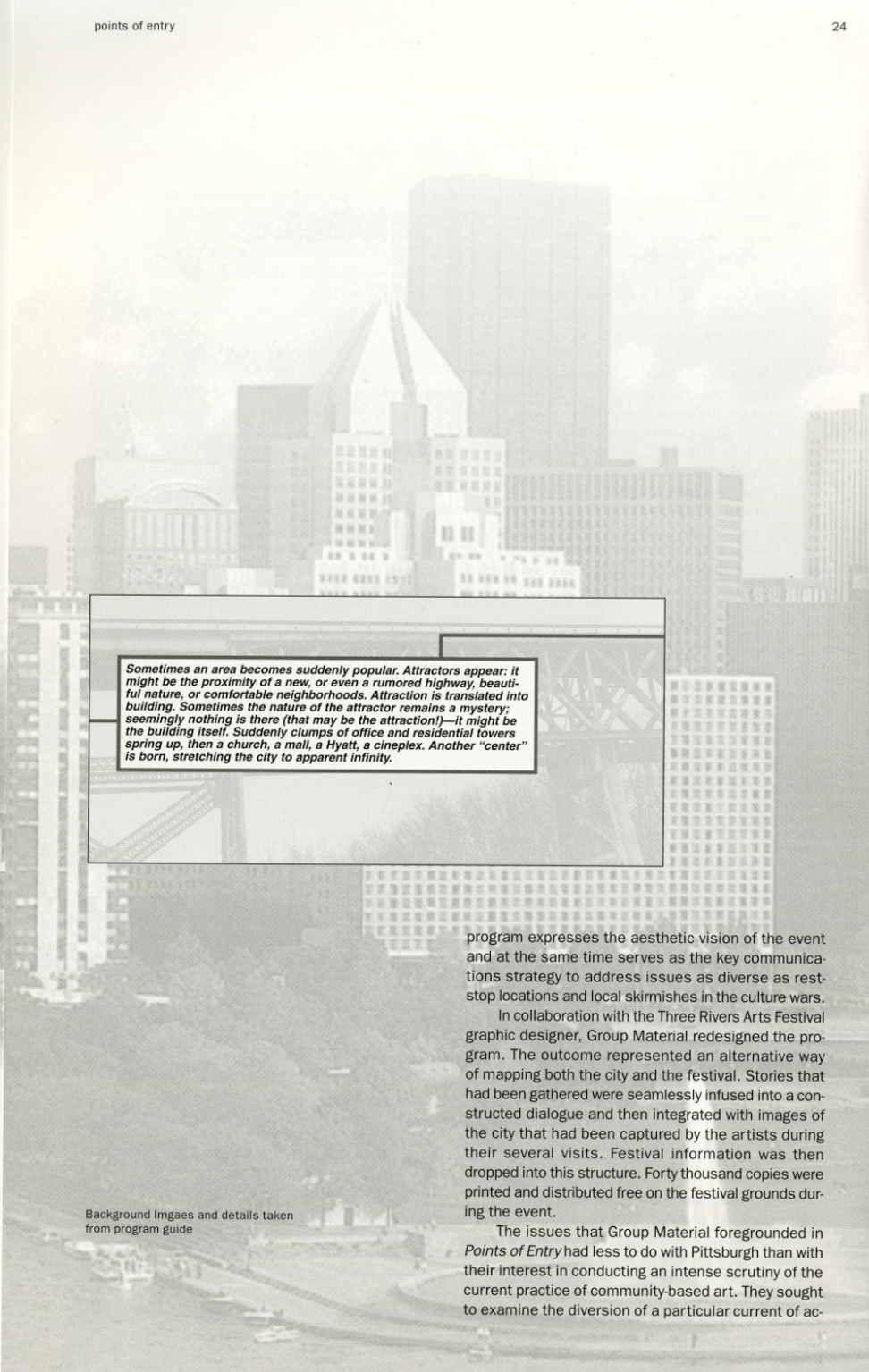
Our exhibitions and projects are intended to be forums in which multiple points of view are represented in a variety of styles and methods.

—Group Material in *On Democracy*, 1990

The statement above
is taken from Group Material's
introduction to the
1996 Festival Program Guide.

Group Material worked with the festival's designer in a collaborative effort to co-design the brochure to integrate the outcomes of their work with the festival's communications requirement. Group Material is a New York-based collective that investigates interrelationships between aesthetics and politics.

Soon after their first visit to Pittsburgh in June 1995, it was clear that Group Material's methodology of identifying multiple strategies through which to express cultural activism would certainly be at work during their project for *Points of Entry*. Their project began with a plan to determine how people in Pittsburgh use the city in unusual, forgotten, marginal, or unofficial ways. Information was solicited through a series of newspaper advertisements placed in local publications under the headline "Pittsburgh Stories...Secrets, Myths, Memories, Confessions." In the advertisement urging readers to send their stories, Group

Material described themselves as an artists' research team working with the Three Rivers Arts Festival to search for "lost histories."

The same process of retrieval of Pittsburgh stories was carried out through Group Material's appearance in March 1996 on a local radio talk show. After the artists requested that the public call in with their "lost histories" of the community, the station was flooded with calls. For more than three hours, listeners described their memories of steel mills, amusement parks, neighborhood movie theaters, and a particularly Pittsburgh way of life—features of an urban landscape that had been lost.

One goal of gathering these stories was to form an alternative way of mapping how a particular segment of the local populace, one that Group Material identified as "consumers of urban planning," uses the city. A second goal was to collect stories from individuals whom Group Material imagined as the producers of urban experiences—architects, corporate

leaders, city planners, and others within the acknowledged power structure that manipulates urban spaces. Together, these narratives would constitute their discourse on the urban environment. Group Material augmented this constructed discourse by conducting interviews in public places around the city, amassing testimonials to patterns of utilization of public space in order to form the frame for the commentary that would become their *Points of Entry* project.

In line with their expressed intent to consider the term "community" in relation to the Arts Festival itself, Group Material proposed to integrate the stories and testimonials into the printed program for the festival. This publication functions as the official guide to exhibitions and performances, the public's source for festival information, and the primary vehicle the organization uses to mediate between the artists and the audience. Curatorial essays, performance schedules, and sponsor advertisements appear together without privileging or diminishing any single component. The
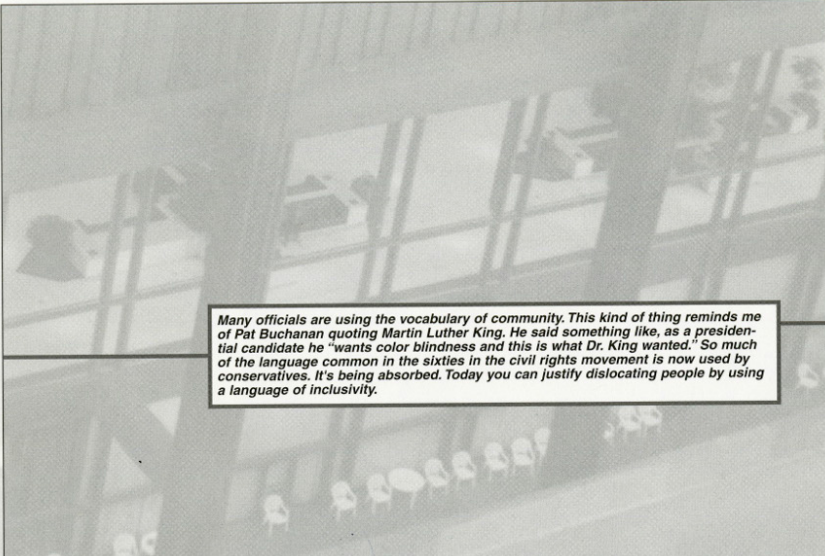
Many officials are using the vocabulary of community. This kind of thing reminds me of Pat Buchanan quoting Martin Luther King. He said something like, as a presidential candidate he "wants color blindness and this is what Dr. King wanted." So much of the language common in the sixties in the civil rights movement is now used by conservatives. It's being absorbed. Today you can justify dislocating people by using a language of inclusivity.

Sometimes an area becomes suddenly popular. Attractors appear: it might be the proximity of a new, or even a rumored highway, beautiful nature, or comfortable neighborhoods. Attraction is translated into building. Sometimes the nature of the attractor remains a mystery; seemingly nothing is there (that may be the attraction!)—it might be the building itself. Suddenly clumps of office and residential towers spring up, then a church, a mall, a Hyatt, a cineplex. Another "center" is born, stretching the city to apparent infinity.

Background Imgaes and details taken
from program guide

program expresses the aesthetic vision of the event and at the same time serves as the key communications strategy to address issues as diverse as rest-stop locations and local skirmishes in the culture wars.

In collaboration with the Three Rivers Arts Festival graphic designer, Group Material redesigned the program. The outcome represented an alternative way of mapping both the city and the festival. Stories that had been gathered were seamlessly infused into a constructed dialogue and then integrated with images of the city that had been captured by the artists during their several visits. Festival information was then dropped into this structure. Forty thousand copies were printed and distributed free on the festival grounds during the event.

The issues that Group Material foregrounded in *Points of Entry* had less to do with Pittsburgh than with their interest in conducting an intense scrutiny of the current practice of community-based art. They sought to examine the diversion of a particular current of ac-

tivist activity into what they perceived to be a mainstream institution, the Three Rivers Arts Festival. Group Material questioned a process whereby institutions—even well-meaning, marginalized, community-based institutions—appropriate radical modes of challenging dominant ideology. Their inquiry problematized the assumption that critical cultural practices, such as community engagement, can survive the integration into institutional frameworks.

Throughout the process of creating their project, Group Material expressed a commitment to positioning their work as contesting the "professionalization of community-based art," wherein institutions, funders, and even some artists undermine the practice of community engagement, substituting instead a kind of therapeutic cultural balm. They questioned whether the term "community" has been so debased by countless feel-good, fifteen-minute-quick-fix-empowerment projects that the transgressive nature of the form has been rendered completely impotent.

In one of their early communications with the Arts Festival, Group Material described their project as exploring the idea of "the production and the consumption of the public sphere." Community-based art has, for better or worse, taken its place within that dynamic, and Group Material's relentless investigation of the form assures that the dialogue regarding its survival as an activist strategy will continue.

MARY JANE JACOB
IN CONVERSATION WITH THE PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Reflections upon Exiting *Points of Entry*

Introduction

It is a privilege to publish a catalogue after the opening, not just to be able to insert a photograph not available earlier because a work was in progress, or to record a process that continued up to, through, or even after the opening. Rather, it is an opportunity to write from a critical distance and allow for reflection in a way that is not possible when all the energy has to be put into just making it happen; it is an occasion to see what theoretical concepts developed out of this instance of practice and to take that experience somewhere else. In this spirit I interviewed the participating artists in January 1997, six months after this Three Rivers Arts Festival event. The issues that emerged out of some observations which I posed and the artists' thoughts about them have value in Pittsburgh and beyond, within the larger territory we call "public art" today.

The statements that follow are not consistent in their point of view; each participating artist took a different approach to working in public and responded in varying degrees to the particular subjects raised in our conversations. In fact, these differences were an important and distinguishing aspect of *Points of Entry*. It was a program that did not seek to offer one single way of thinking about art and community, one model for making public art. It is only by considering the varied but related practices of the moment—represented in part by the artists here—that we can come to an understanding of the expanded relationship between art and the public that is being developed in this decade, while simultaneously creating room for continued changes in this new genre of public art.

1. The Categorization Dilemma: Art or non-art? Can art have a social motivation and still be art?

Observation:

The activist role of artists in society has become a much-debated topic in the art world of the 1990s. Among the many criticisms of "new public art" as a community-based strategy, I might cite one recent example by Christopher Knight, who characterized such work in this way: "Replacing a culture of complaint with a therapeutic ideal reminds you that touting moral goodness is beside art's point. Giving convincing visual form to ideas is what really counts."[1] For artists to use visual art to address issues of the larger society as well as aesthetics seems to tip the scales and, to the art system and its critics, move this work outside the definition of art. The Three Rivers Arts Festival, by contrast, offered among its goals for the 1996 program: "To exhibit and present works of art that are characterized by the innovative use of public space, genuine rather than contrived community participation, aesthetic integrity, activism, and a sense of empowerment for all participants."[2]

While there is criticism that art with communities is not art, ironically, the contrary view exists: that new public art is *too* art-oriented.[3] As a defender of the social application of art and the simultaneous value of this work as *art*, I find that artists undertake such work out of a combination of intellectual and aesthetic, political and social, sympathetic and self-interested purposes; that their efforts are incredibly demanding and useful—even if in small, incremental ways; and that this art plays an essential role in our thinking about what is art in postmodern, multicultural, *fin-de-siècle* society. However, good intentions and sincere efforts by the artist, even profound drama and importance of the subject, do not necessarily generate art that is profound or important. Yet instead of establishing new and appropriate evaluative criteria, much art-world discussion of this genre degenerates into competitive, perhaps cynical, views on this art. Even the dynamics within the public art field itself are far from being open, generous, sharing, and constructive—attributes that seem consistent and "natural," yet are lacking.[4] But is being critical of and applying criteria to community-based public art tantamount to letting the wolves in?

Responses:

Group Material. Aesthetic problems are also political problems; there is not an easy separation of art from the social subject. We use the exhibition space or public space as a way to make a cultural space. For us, site-specific practice, spaces in museums, and public space are related; space is a medium of power and not just of formal relationships.

In Pittsburgh the fact that we did not have a visible product—an art object—was a problem for some. You didn't read these statements and say, "Ah, this is art again." But we think the project was a success because it didn't look like art. Our work was our texts among the other informational materials, and the art experience was just to get people to read it as part of the usual, official program. This was a subversive strategy to obscure its status as art; we did not want to know about audience reaction, because we did not want to be a controlling force. We do not want to do what people recognize as art or activism—"activism" is now just another dismissed category that separates people into us and them.

The "pick your neighborhood" technique did not work for us here, because at the center of our project was a critique of such practices. We wanted to question the community-based approach that has arisen in which artists are framed as authority figures. This is now a historic problem that originates with the 1960s practice of the artist working outside the studio and that has led to a fetishizing of the body of the artist. In its present-day form, artists have been welcomed into communities as wizards from another kind of world. Identified by some as the new social workers, they are looked to by others to take over a symbolic replacement function in delivering social services.

There needs to be a way of practicing publicly without being evangelical. For us, "cultural animators" is a better term for artists who organize people who do not necessarily share the same identity or situation as the artists themselves. The practice is more about the situation and has a more varied situational application than the straightforward didactic, social issue-oriented approach.

Ann Carlson. I'm in the middle of a personal dilemma with respect to "community-based art." My roots in the dance and performance world led me to work with many different people (lawyers, security officers, nuns . . .). After a few years it began to be labeled community-based. The act of putting ways of working into categories is a necessary shorthand, I guess, but I've always felt suspicious and uneasy about it. Calling some work "community-based" and other work not, immediately sets up lines, a duality, and

sometimes an implied hierarchy. But I also never protested the work being called that. So here I am years later with a body of work that I'm questioning—or at least questioning how to continue: How much does an artwork matter? What impact does it have? What importance?

Developing this project for me has been so personal, challenging my abilities to conceptualize, to give form to my experiences. I have been deeply moved and honored to be present with the physicians and nurses, but the questions raised for me have been overwhelming. In the presence of actual blood, or at a birth, I found for the first time I was questioning: "What else can I bring to this?"

Michelle Illuminato. I see myself as a "primary researcher." I do not start with a theory, but develop the theory as I go, through an organic process. In *What Do We Win?* I wanted to alleviate loneliness among women, who I think are its greatest victims. I discovered resistance on the part of those at home: the group that I first wanted to deal with were the hardest women to reach because they were shut up in their homes. Later I discovered that the issue of loneliness could be better dealt with by working with women who were themselves dealing with it, and so I sought out women at senior centers. There, new issues came up around their daily lives—in Pittsburgh and in a particular neighborhood. To my surprise I found that I was dealing with the actual of the everyday instead of their remembered past, as had been the case with my previous work. The work became about multiple issues and multiple audiences.

Lonnie Graham. I am interested in things that are basic to human nature, that are about us all: food, housing, clothes, and after these, what we need for fullness of life—spirituality. People have sought and striven for these things throughout time, and the arts have always been fundamental to the community. A community needs to approach problems from an organic standpoint, an artistic way of thinking. You can't have civilization without the arts, can't have culture without the arts. This need has been fundamental to the community in addressing its needs.

Daniel J. Martinez. The argument of social work versus art (by which I believe others mean art as commodity) does not allow artists to be risk-taking. We need to have a way to embrace philosophical ideas larger than an individual artist or author, and for this a community of persons is needed. But we also have to justify our *activity* as art because it doesn't fit someone's existing construct. I do not understand the making of things (art objects) as ever risk-taking; I have no urgency to make things, but rather to work in real time with situations revolving around issues of class, and thereby maintain an understanding of and connectedness to risk, experimentation, and failure.

Fred Wilson. I work in museums because museums say they are public—and then I hold their feet to the fire to make clear where their publicness ends and rhetoric begins. I work to broaden the art world, to bring in those who are disinclined to be involved in it. To me, one of the most difficult situations in which to make public art is in a museum. The Three Rivers Arts Festival project was different because I was not critiquing a museum directly but looking at the convention of the historical house museum that is also open to the public for an admission fee. I tried to make a public house museum, although everything about it was created since it was not an already existing institution.

Yes, I do believe art can have a social motivation and still be art. The social aspects of public art are important in my work as well, but I am most interested in the personal transformative process of art—what it can do if it is really good—that other things, like social work and educational programs, can't do. When a work of

art is functioning at a certain level, it can open people's eyes and other parts of their beings. In my work this must be perceived experientially as well as intellectually. I feel it would be easier for me to create a social agenda; I would be more detached, less personally invested—"doing good for 'those' people." But I am interested in making work that can give entry into what art can do for one's life, illuminating or changing perceptions, rather than, let's say, specifically targeting how art can relate to "my housing problem." I personally find it more honest. I've learned from the socially motivated developments in public art of the last twenty-five years, but I do not wish to overstate that aspect. My background, my childhood, and my life experience all inform my work constantly—as I believe they do every artist's work. Socially transformative aspects occur in my art because awareness of the social environment is a part of my reality, my history. For me, it comes back to my reason for being an artist and I have no pretense about doing this purely or primarily for social reasons.

2. The Collaborative Crisis: What happens when artists share the artistic process with participants?

Observation:

If we assume that aesthetic and social issues can be joined in a project, as a work of art, and through the work of the artist, then what constitutes "authentic" or "genuine" community participation? Who is in control of the project? Who is the author and who decides about the form of the project? Can an artist from outside a community work with members of that community and make a work about their issues? If the artist is accountable to those he or she has engaged, then in what way? To be the voice of others, to allow the voice of others to emerge, to create a remedial work that will heal? To be a catalyst for change? Or, as artists seek to speak outside the hermetic art world, is it not important to just identify ways to communicate directly with the members of the public through the vehicle of *art*? When a particular segment of the public participates, the question arises: who is the project for? Can there be another audience outside the targeted community? Can the work meaningfully communicate to others?

Miwon Kwon has stated that this public art is dependent upon marginalized communities, and that can prove to be a narrow, even exploitative focus as projects claim to give voice to marginalized groups outside the dominant mainstream.[5] This view is echoed by Timothy Luke, who asserts that "activist artists, like social workers, community organizers, urban planners, or other professional-technical cadres devoted to social engineering, need debased communities in order to realize their vocational goals."[6]

Roberta Smith spoke of this art as "activities" that "may constitute a new kind of process art, one that has 'you had to be there' written all over it . . . even more limited and exclusionary than the 'art of abstraction.'"[7] By contrast, Luke has posited that the audience "is the symbol-analysts in city hall, corporate towers, or not-for-profits suites."[8]

Can this public art be effective in achieving the social goals of a community, and if so, when is its effectiveness effective enough? Is it enough to involve only fifteen people in a project? (When we speak of teaching or the museum experience, it is said that it is enough to have touched just one person's life.) When is the artist's involvement in a community long enough? A month, a summer, a year, years? Is there not the possibility, as with a work of art in the museum, for a brief encounter to have value throughout a lifetime? Can others in art or social agencies continue the work begun by the artist, adapt it, and institutionalize it with change but without compromise? Does not

that rootedness constitute a level of success of this art even as it moves outside the definition of art, perhaps proving that art can affect or even become life?

Responses:

Lonnie Graham. Working with communities is not an issue of aesthetic control. Of course, that depends on where you start from. My project at The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia in 1993 was my first serious effort at collaboration. I learned that everyone had something to contribute and that people are generally pretty smart, so it is important to shut up and listen. It was the beginning of my understanding of how a community can validate an event. If I think I can do it all, I am limiting myself, being exclusive, narrowing the scope of possibilities for what can happen and how the work can impact the community.

The concept of art in Africa and before the Western institution of museums is instructive in this regard. Going to Africa for the past twenty years, I learned that there art has a purpose. It is part of everyday life; in everyday life, art becomes validated (even if it isn't called art). My aim here is to make art more utilitarian and art practice a more integral part of life. In African communities the power of the object comes through interaction and in the identification with it. It is not an issue of the artist's maintaining control. You make a mask or an icon and then you give it to the community; there it begins to grow and the object is taken over in its use. Art in its Western form is an exclusive activity, often one person making something for one person.

In my work, I'm the artist. Anyone can dig in the ground, but I am there to make sure that something more than just growing produce occurs. I am a nonlinear, organic thinker; I approach things in three or four directions at once; I throw out propositions—what might happen—and then wait for others to react, facilitating creative and organic thinking in others. So, like the mask-maker who makes an object and then sets it out for community reaction, whereby it becomes part of a social system bigger than the object, I initiate an idea that leads to a community process. It is this dialogue that I set up. I don't think it is about giving voice, but rather listening—having a conversation with others. You need to listen to the voice of the community, become conversant with it, participate in it, become included, rather than remain exclusive.

Who's marginal? Everybody thinks they are not marginal. If we are talking about economics, many people are two paychecks away from homelessness, living marginally; I guess I live marginally. I was poor, so I work with "marginal" communities. Those are the people I see in the world. I meet people who do not have as much as I have and I work with them. This does not preclude my working with other marginal groups, whether marginal by ethnicity or economy.

Daniel J. Martinez. To critics, nonmarginal equals the elite, the entitlement class. I choose to work with others. To me "marginal" is an existing and real category.

Michelle Illuminato. The relationship to community is a complex one, a living thing that keeps changing, even after the structure is put in place. While I encouraged that organic growth and change, I also came to realize that structure does not cancel out freedom—it can facilitate participation. In *What Do We Win?* I encouraged the women to think about how they might want to be aesthetically represented and tried to give them control of the framework of the project. I found that the women were interested in being part of the project, yet did not want to determine how they would be aesthetically represented. They were glad to offer information, but they left it to me to resolve the work because they saw

me as more artistically qualified. Game playing emerged as the metaphor. We are not allowed to play as adults; games are an activity associated with youth and old age, and that age factor trivializes the activity. The women who participated in *What Do We Win?* are in good health. They are concerned about the perceptions that they are not able to take care of themselves and that younger people restrict their freedom and question their judgment. Games became a way to create a foundation, a net upon which they could build trust among themselves. Game-playing became the community and structured their relationships; it allowed room for reflection—to reflect back on daily lives; it was a mechanism for thinking.

They were interested in playing, in participating in the game that became the artwork. They were interested in my being there and in this project being a part of their daily lives. While some could see that this art went beyond the museum definition and others were confused, none challenged whether it was art. They were interested and engaged, open and willing to learn, and far less hostile than art critics about the definition of what is art.

Eventually, the gameboard became the image of the community. Art can build communities, but perhaps more important, as in this case, it can reveal existing, unrecognized communities. The effects in the end were not clearly remedial—alleviating loneliness, the aim I began with—but are less clear, will take a longer time to surface; or, as with the viewing of art, the changes may happen internally rather than being outwardly expressed in direct and demonstrable ways. Art can empower people and bring attention to situations that often go unnoticed except for those they directly touch. I see my work at its best as a catalyst for change. While I don't think that I must work with a marginal group to have an authentic experience, I do see the model of center/margin as a useful tool when critiquing power structures, although this oversimplification can be used to uphold a power structure. The situation is much more complex than a binary question of marginal/nonmarginal. There are intersecting, multiple, overlapping groups; communities are not homogeneous bodies. Many people feel marginal in one way or another, and the understanding of marginality changes with the viewpoint. I see the process of marginalization as centrally important for artists.

Ann Carlson. Some of my ethical dilemmas with respect to working in community have been manifested in the question "In what world do we exist?" As a choreographer, in the past I would be admitted into one world as an outsider—in the case of the festival, it was a hospital—and at some point in the process invite others into my world. But what if the second part of the process is impossible due to time or perceived lack of interest, or even my own uncertainty as to the appropriateness of the form of working I have developed over the years and which has become natural to me? Perhaps the work is then simply the body-in-time, my being there with that doctor and patient in that moment witnessing life in this focused and curious way.

I've had another opportunity recently to address and respond to the worlds of others and issues of voice, presence, body. Mary Ellen Strom and I were commissioned separately by The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and decided to work together. We created a performance/installation based on the form of a rodeo—rodeo as a symbol of the dominant center. The rodeo announcer, myself, proclaimed the skills of the invisible contestants (women from other parts of the world who created images of their real stories viewed through binoculars at the rodeo's perimeter). I was motivated by a desire to reconcile the knowledge of suffering: How do we as members of contemporary global society respond to the moment-by-moment awareness of another's suffering, or another's celebration, for that matter? The work took a different public form—not an intimate collaboration in which we worked with a small group of nonper-

formers, a "community"—but rather with disparate, distant others who informed the piece and for whom we made a space to represent their points of view. It took place in a museum, which is yet again another world, thereby placing the work within a world of a certain tradition, where there is a different foundation for the work and a different way of engaging the work as a viewer.

Fred Wilson. I'm hesitant to get involved in a community that I'm not part of and to take that as my subject. The museum community is a marginal, if not unpowerful, community. But in the museum my aim is also to expand the community, the audience, to show museums that there are other publics out there. I help facilitate this by doing lectures outside the museum world and in community locations to personalize the process of making art and bring down a peg the mystique of the artist. I am not involved in the hands-on, grass-roots programming efforts with community members; at that level the museum itself has to buy in and take on the process. I want various communities to see what I do and bring a larger public into what I do than would traditionally or otherwise come to the museum. I want to include those who share a part of my identity, if not all parts of my identity. Mine is a multicultural agenda by which in the museum you find the tools to understand the world in ways that acknowledge the existence of various points of view and learn about that which relates to you. The barriers to audience development don't have to do with the art—that's the fun part about it. People are open to art if they feel it is open to them.

In *An Invisible Life: A View into the World of a 120-Year-Old Man,* for the first time I was not dealing with an open, public place. This paralleled the history I was interested in—one that had not yet been made public. In order to make the project challenging on another level, I focused on the closeted gay community. I wanted to understand how this community functioned historically and today in the Pittsburgh environment. That was a significant choice. The out gay men who live quiet lives were a fount of information. And as with my other projects where I work with museum communities and try to bring in others, I looked to the community immediately surrounding the house and worked with individuals there to galvanize them, to involve them, and to build local interest.

Group Material. We do not subscribe to the victim concept of marginal communities. It's a late-twentieth-century problem, a misreading of identity. You need to use the term "marginal" in situational, very specific ways. People can determine their own relationship to marginalization; there is no fixed identity on either side. But for this fluidity, this subjectivity, to exist, we need to create flexible, critical spaces to move around in—a difficult task.

The term "community" often refers to an entity or marginalized group without internal factions. Community is a simplified idea, so we end up back with stereotypes again. Activist art works when its focus is on a special issue, when it deals with an essentialism, that is, we are all alike because of a particular trait bond, anything from having AIDS to wearing glasses. But the approach of essentialist art can become irrelevant outside that community and even inside when the group decides it doesn't want to be thought of as just people who wear glasses. We need new terms, because today we know that just because we put art outside doesn't mean it has a public function. Alternately, just because art has political concerns doesn't mean it's socially constructive, or just because artists are in communities doesn't mean they will make effective social interactions.

In Pittsburgh we also saw there were problematic uses of urban space—and how public art projects fit into that urban renewal agenda. There is a rationalizing of the city going on with urban renewal. We were seeking divergency from the model that tries to centralize urban renewal and thus limits the possibilities for interaction with urban space. We didn't need to repeat these urban failures; we refused to humanize the city along the lines of liberalized corporate capitalism, but chose rather to point to

communities not measurable in these terms. We were interested in how the word "community" is used by the Three Rivers Arts Festival, too. So we felt we needed to address the concept behind the festival and to look at how arts institutions can, perhaps unconsciously, rationalize their role, not even recognizing that their idea of community is a way of normalizing their own members and putting them back within this urban renewal model. Thus, as artists dealing with issues of representation, we sought to create representations of sustained uses of space that still exist in spite of urban renewal—uses that may be hidden.

What the Festival Program Guide was really about was community—groups speaking out about their own interests, but without necessarily the rhetoric of power behind their efforts. They are everyday stories, treatments of space that let people think differently about Pittsburgh. We refused to use identity politics and geography as definitions; we refused to use terms that play into social fragmentation. Instead people talked about space, how they move through the city. Keeping the speakers anonymous was a strategy of accountability: to let people be accountable to themselves—at least as much as is possible—and avoid self-censorship. What resulted is a fragmented, unofficial representation of the City of Pittsburgh, one that you do not easily come across when you are a visitor there.

3. A Critique Based on Mistrust

Observation:

For a genre in which trust is key to the artists' working relationship with others, it is curious how community-based public art has provoked such mistrust from several fronts. From inside the public art field, there is opposition to the proliferation of this work: claims that many artists do not have the right strategy, that their work lacks critique or the "right" kind of critique; claims about whose art is more right, whose goodness is more good, as some artists defend their preeminence or guard their artistic territory. From outside the public art field, there is also a mistrust of artists' motives. Timothy Luke says of these artists: "By aestheticizing ordinary activity in everyday life or rebuilding community infrastructure as 'art projects', artists can build careers, shock art galleries, and redeem themselves by giving the underclass (or all those who feel uncomfortable in art museums) 'empowerment.'"[9]

There is a mistrust that artists are being used by institutions and funders to serve the status quo and mollify problem areas, giving the appearance of a solution and distracting attention away from the real social problems and need for much more significant resources to make genuine change, while making funding agencies and corporations look good.[10] This is a problematic argument—this condition is the story of American patronage. One has only to look to the nearby Carnegie Institute for a classic example, and most people in the arts and academia are or have been connected to an institution or a grant, or have in some way been a beneficiary of this system of funding. The question is not so much where grants come from, as how they are used. Should we equate funds granted by arts foundations bearing the names Heinz, Ford, Rockefeller, or Cummings, with community efforts that use the arts as part of a marketing strategy through programs of the companies'—and not artists'—design?[11]

There is mistrust of community-based public art as quality art because too many people and a public outside the art world support it. This seems a continued application of the conventional elitist view that "really important" contemporary art cannot be embraced by large numbers of people, by persons unsophisticated and un-

educated in art, and/or in its own time. To be "popular" is to be low art. And, of course, along with the view that to be new or avant-garde is to be anti-institutional, comes a mistrust of the arts organizations and social agencies that serve as the organizing umbrellas. There is an attitude that institutions get involved solely for the credit and for self-sustaining reasons, such as funding opportunities; such agencies are seen as suspicious rather than supportive and stimulating.[12] Is institutional association necessarily negative and the work compromised by institutional association, or can the work even have a formative effect on the values and operations of the host institutions?[13] And when Hal Foster asks—"What is displaced when the museum 'commissions' such critique? Perhaps any self-understanding of its own desires and interests? Is that why it does it—to *contain* critique?"[14]—it is clear that he has little understanding of the process of theory into practice. The level of negotiation and learning that must occur between all parties in such a collaboration is difficult. Community-based public art is not the easy route to fulfilling one's own institutional interests. It is filled with challenges and confrontations en route to building new alliances. But it is a real means of understanding where each party is coming from as new relationships are tested, and it is a viable mode through which change is being made.

So we are left with the question of whether, to be genuine, work has to exist outside the museum or any other institution and without mainstream, "power-based" funding, and maybe even without "too many" people getting it!

Responses:

Lonnie Graham. In approaching a community, I have always tried to figure out what they expect before I make a move. I have always believed I have a responsibility to myself and to the community. You need to function in a place without pretense and with integrity, so that as a project grows you have this foundation. I am surprised there are so many negative ways to describe a really fundamental activity; this comes out of the critics' self-reflection and not out of their actual participation, not out of knowing what it is really like in the community. The more people come and do and work, the more they start to figure out themselves and the less mysterious this relationship with community and others becomes. It is about understanding, and with that understanding comes greater power and with that power comes the knowledge of self, and then there is no room for fear.

I am interested in art outside the way that Western museums deal with it, but why can't museums turn around? Why can't they say: "This is what happened before Western art" (it's an ancient concept found in the heritage of indigenous people), and why can't they make a "living museum," where artists and communities can have a place and art can have a living function in the community? The Three Rivers Arts Festival was my ideal. The festival administrators said: "Here is some money, time, and space, now what will you do?" I tried, in turn, to do the same to the community.

Ann Carlson. In the last few years my *Real People* works have been "institutionalized" in different ways. This is a situation I try to work with, not against, or particularly vilify. Early on I worked in a more guerilla style, contacting people myself, going in on my own. The works were then performed in alternative art spaces. Gradually the art spaces commissioned something I was already working on or a museum asked for a finished work. Before long I was being invited by the institution to work somewhere they had paved for me. In Pittsburgh I was very intrigued by the possibility of entering into the hospital institution and the Three Rivers Arts Festival facilitated this. The process was often slow and bogged down by hospital bureaucracy. But it was all part of the process.

Fred Wilson. The finiteness of the Three Rivers Arts Festival was a problem for me. The festival itself was a plus because it was something to rally around, a reason for people to get involved, but the project needed more time to sink in. It could have gotten interesting to see more linkages to gay and lesbian communities; there could have been a larger dialogue about this in a way a Pittsburgh community could have handled, in a way that would be natural for the community. It was a beginning because there was a wide cross section of people who came to the house—everyone from denizens of the former Studio 54 to Knights of Columbus members. More could have happened if it was woven into the fabric of the festival and had gone on long after, and into other programs that could have expanded on issues for which my work could have served as a catalyst or focal point.

For me, in addition to the objects and installation, the essential part is the programming. My work takes a long time, but institutions can't cope with that time frame; it gets expensive in their terms to explore the directions that the project might go in the process and to follow an organic route. I have gotten institutions to the point of trust where this can happen. While this was not the case with the festival, which had a finite schedule, institutions sometimes use time to control the project, to limit how deeply it cuts. Institutions need to make a commitment to make the work happen.

What are those who mistrust our motives and this practice of public art really doing? Museum professionals and arts writers have traditional and "safe" institutional and university affiliations. Yet some of them criticize us for having institutional or community alliances (or because of governmental, corporate, and foundation sources of funding)—for not being avant-garde enough to have abandoned such social and cultural structures. At the same time, they don't see that they themselves are using traditional forms of criticism, which are ill-equipped to truly understand, evaluate, and critique this work. Issues should be raised by others, but they need to understand that this is a different creative, developmental process. Art that involves communities, that evolves over time, demands a time frame and commitment to understand it that are similar to the artist's investment. Moreover, the process of negotiation is critical to this way of working, but negotiation is new in art and foreign to the modernist way of thinking about art making.

Michelle Illuminato. In the beginning I wanted to meander, visit, and have unstructured encounters with women. It was important to have the freedom to develop and change the project as you go. The Three Rivers Arts Festival allowed this growth to happen, and *What Do We Win?* propelled me to think about the performance aspects of my installations as a way to have a project embody multiple realities. I have learned that a single project can have many faces: it can make more than one statement. I now see making installations that incorporate performance, but with the performances being real—real life—not something contrived that allows the work to be more than one thing. I also think it is important for the audience to have something to take away, as here, where they took the gameboard and could participate in the game by putting stickers on as they moved from community to community. The mechanism of participation is something important that I am taking away from this experience. When something is given to the audience, it makes the experience of the work physical; it becomes a concrete way to get into the ideas; it is a gift that invites interaction of various sorts and becomes personal, not just spectacle but something to reflect upon individually.

Group Material. The mistrust critiques have truth, but they also reflect a simplified idea because challenging process is what this public art is about. For us it is important to integrate the framework of the institution into the work, to understand the framework within which we are participating. The process is one of questioning and pushing that framework. The Three Rivers Arts Festival was our community: from the beginning we had the

idea that the Three Rivers Arts Festival was the subject we wanted to deal with. A festival, like a museum, is a public space, but a museum, like a festival, maintains a construction of high/low divisions in art. From our perception this exists in the hierarchy of one-person shows placed in white rooms, group shows in corporate lobbies, and big juried shows presented as outdoor fairs. It is difficult for the institution to deal with the different needs they must serve and to act in a self-critical mode. This is the dilemma for any institution in addressing its constituencies: various audiences, sponsors, patrons, and board members, other civic and institutional concerns; all these conflicting agendas sought to incorporate as part of our piece. The Festival Program Guide was a self-reflection in the framework of the festival. This led to problems in implementing the project within the festival system because they touched a subconscious level of the organization's way of working. We found that people's ideas about the purpose of the festival were worlds apart.

Daniel J. Martinez. Outside the door of the museum is the community, but to me museums are not designed to handle that community; there is neither the mindset nor the infrastructure. They can't be quick enough to respond; they can't deal with a living entity—artists and community; it rubs against the essence of why the museum exists. Therefore, to be outside is important and necessary. The forming of institutionalized relationships has become one of expecting artists to solve problems and not letting them question and experiment.

Some artists got scared by the debate. The criticism is pushing artists back into the studio and this criticism is dangerous because it enters the training of young students who get indoctrinated by this stuff. But the criticism comes from people who cannot or do not put practice and theory together, and for whom there is no necessity or urgency. They are working without responsibility. For them the need or purpose for art is not an issue. Theirs is rather a need to attack new public art in specific ways; they strip away integrity and feed on mistrust.

Critics are so narrow in their analysis; they do not think organically, responding to the subject and situation, then coming back to the theory and questioning it. Engaging this work and its meaning must be an interactive, cooperative experience. And there must be room to change one's mind—which means to not hold an authority position. But while this can happen with the curator-artist relationship, it is lacking in the critical framework. Why? Because critics need to exercise their authoritative point of view, not to be questioning. And whom do they serve, what community? They serve their own careers; they write for the art world and are still part of the same system, while we are moving out and between systems.

Artists do not build careers by exploiting community. When they work outside the conventional art-world infrastructure, their "careers" are outside, too. They are responsible to community and to talk outside the art world because that is the way to challenge the power structure, and I believe that, as Edward Said remarked, the continuing role of the intellectual is to challenge.

But now I feel like I need to work differently, to locate a new possibility for challenge in order to be effective, because new genre or community-based public art is a used/used-up/abused form. I need a new territory. I still have questions, but this has to go somewhere else. Now is a pause, a time to rethink. . . .

NOTES

1 Christopher Knight, "The Socio-Art Genre," *Los Angeles Times,* 18 March 1997.

2 Jeanne Pearlman, in Statement of Goals and Ojectives, "Three Rivers Arts Festival 1996 Public Art Initiative," 1995.

3 Speaking of a process-oriented public-art program which I curated for Sculpture Chicago, *Culture in Action* (1991–94), Deborah Karasov criticized it for its theoretical basis, calling it "the conventional art one, and therefore product-oriented (if not object-oriented). . . . The artists try to summarize and symbolize the social and historical framework in an artwork rather than all the projects relating to that framework and having the meaning come from that framework." Deborah Karasov, "Is Placemaking an Art?" *Public Art Review* 8 (Fall/Winter 1996): 25.

4 For instance, Joyce Kozloff marked her own entry into the field as predating the new wave and made a distinction between what she calls public relations and public art. To make her point she has composed a list of "The Ten Most Popular Public Art Projects in the 90's" ("1. It's a Small World," etc.) which she admits is satirical, but nonetheless is belittling of other artists' efforts in its cynical categorization. Joyce Kozloff, "The Kudzu Effect (or: The Rise of a New Academy," *Public Art Review* 8 (Fall/Winter 1996): 41.

5 "There is a certain focus on the marginal community. There is a desire to engage the 'marginal' as a means to give identity to places, because these areas are often automatically linked to a suppressed history and perceived to 'hold' some source of authenticity in relation to identity." Miwon Kwon in "On Site-Specificity, A Discussion with Hal Foster, Renee Green, Mitchell Kane, Miwon Kwon, John Lindell, Helen Molesworth," *Documents* 45 (Spring 1994): 13.

6 Timothy Luke, "Review: But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism; Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago," *Contemporary Sociology* 25 (September 1996): 681–83.

7 Roberta Smith, "A Lot to See (But Not an Artwork in Sight)," *The New York Times,* 11 May 1997.

8 "It is difficult, however, to judge how far these artists really go, since so much activist art is aimed at affecting the moral sensibilities of the same professional-technical classes who operate the bureaucratic techno-structures of advanced corporate capitalism. The prime audience for the message politics of activist art is the symbol-analysts in city hall, corporate towers, or not-for-profits suites." Luke (note 6).

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid. Luke sees an inherent hypocrisy in accepting funds for such work from big corporate foundations and phil-anthropic agencies which at their core may have contributed to the very social conditions that this work aims to address. He says: "When this intervention takes the form of professional artists—usually not from the neighborhood—working with corporate and nonprofit organization sponsorship . . . one might doubt whose personal redemption or empowerment is being served."

11 Some questions seem naive, such as Hal Foster's, "Did the sponsors want to be re-positioned in relation to other institutions and/or to the general public?" ("On Site Specificity" [note 5], 15). This author goes on to assert an untested and undocumented position, stating: "But they could not but also serve as public-relations probes for the corporations and agencies that supported them." Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996): 198.

12 "On Site Specificity" (note 5), 11. For Helen Molesworth, "the various institutional umbrellas under which they are organized is disturbing." Mitchell Kane claims that "the organizing institution has come up with an overriding rhetoric about what the exhibition is supposed to do, which distracts from what the actual artworks might do."

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