

DIY ART AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the collaborative process of members of DIY art collectives in the Pacific Northwest as understood through a collective action lens focused on the cooperative links and motivations of the art collectives. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were used to gather data showing the process of establishing and maintaining membership in a DIY art collective, and the values that motivate the collective's continuation. Drawing on Howard Becker's art world framework as well as literature on social movements and art activism, I show how the DIY art world of this study is fluid, open, and driven by values of social change, community, and freedom of expression.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The idea for this study grew out of my passion for alternative forms of art and music. I had a desire to reconnect with and learn more about the process by which these art forms are made. My entry into the world of art and music was through my family. My aunt was a painter in the impressionist style and my grandfather was a self-taught musician of several instruments. From an early age, my proclivity for art and music was fostered through frequent trips to museums, theatres and symphony halls. During my adolescence, I became involved in a local art and music scene on the East Coast, consisting of small galleries where local art was displayed, and house shows where friends would play music. From there, my interest in do-it-yourself (DIY) art began to develop and express itself as I taught myself how to create my own art and music.

My primary interest at the start of my research was to explore the DIY art scene and better understand the ways people get involved in DIY art collectives and the reasons they stay involved. From there, I developed my initial research questions:

1. How do individuals establish membership in a DIY art collective?
2. Why do these individuals maintain membership in the DIY art collective?

I used the collective action framework of Becker's art worlds to explore the cooperative links that support the DIY art scene. While this framework provided a starting point, it became clear during my research that the art worlds Becker describes and the one that I was involved with had key differences. From there I developed an additional research question:

3. How are values the DIY art world different from those of the mainstream art world?

To better answer this question, I explored the DIY art world in the context of social movements and art activism. This allowed me to understand the values of the DIY art world that were missing from Becker's analysis.

The basic premise of DIY – that individuals can do things on their own instead of relying on professionals – has social and political implications. At an individual level, DIY offers self-sufficiency as an alternative to mass-consumerism, as individuals can make and repair what they need instead of having to continuously purchase more and more. DIY becomes community engagement (exemplified in the term DIT or do-it-together) when individuals organize and share knowledge and resources with one another. DIY becomes a form of activism when individuals organize to directly work on issues (e.g., social, political, environmental) instead of appealing to authority figures for solutions.

Chapter Two details the collective action framework used in my research. I examine Becker's art worlds and review the literature on social movements, art activism and DIY. In Chapter Three I outline the methods used in my research - participant observation and in-depth interviews - and discuss the setting and challenges of my research. Chapter Four focuses on the process of establishing and maintaining membership in a DIY art collective and examines the shared values of its members. I conclude with a discussion on the limitation of my study and possible areas for further development.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In *Collective Action: Theory and Applications*, Todd Sandler (1992:1) defines collective action as arising “when the efforts of two or more individuals are needed to accomplish an outcome.” Sandler (1992:19) notes, “[t]he study of collective action examines the factors that motivate individuals to coordinate their activities to better their collective well-being.” In short, collective action focuses on people “doing things together,” as sociologist Howard Becker describes his research in the field (Plummer 2003). Studying people “doing things together,” involves understanding the ways in which individuals organize to achieve an outcome, as well as the drive or motivation for their organization. The broad nature of this concept permits its application across a variety of fields, including economics, sociology, and anthropology.

In “Art as Collective Action,” Becker (1974) formulates the concept of the production of art as collective action. Becker’s application of collective action to art production was further developed in *Art Worlds* (Becker 1982). Becker’s analysis focuses primarily on traditional art worlds and describes the ways individuals in the traditional art world organize to produce art. In Becker’s analysis, artists work with support personnel to produce art; the underlying drive for their collective action being the attainment of money and status. The collective action framework Becker develops in *Art Worlds* can be used to study other types of art worlds.

In activist art, artists work with a community to produce art; the underlying drive for their collective action is to address some social or political issue. The development of

activist art worlds in the United States is intertwined with the Harlem Renaissance (Rabaka 2011) and the social movements of the 1960s onwards (Finkelpearl 2013).

Artists producing activist art blur the lines between distinctions of art and non-art, artist and non-artist.

In Do-It-Yourself (DIY) art collectives, individuals work together to produce art; the underlying drive for their collective action being the expression of their collective values. The development of DIY art collectives stems from a post-WWII push towards self-sufficiency and has since been connected with a number of social movements, most notably the anarchic-activism of the 70s punk onwards. In DIY art collectives, the distinction between art and non-art, artist and non-artist is further blurred, with a focus instead of skill-sharing as a means of deconstructing the artist non-artist hierarchy (Chidgey 2014).

Art Worlds

The framework of art worlds is a way to understand the production of art as the collective actions of individual people working together to achieve a common goal (Becker 1974). This perspective focuses on the cooperative links built by members of an organization, in this case arts and music collectives, rather than the product of their cooperation. Becker (1982:34) defines art worlds as “the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art.” From this perspective, art is not the product of one person. Rather, a work of art is the product of the collective action of cooperative links using

conventions particular to its art world. As feminist art historian Linda Nochlin (1988:158) notes,

art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, "influenced" by previous artists, and more vaguely and superficially, by "social forces," but, rather, that the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast.

In the following sections, I will further develop the components as theorized by Becker of an art world: 1) Cooperative links; 2) Conventions; 3) Resources; 4) Types of artists; and 5) Distribution systems.

Cooperative links

Overall, it is all but impossible for an artist to create a completely independent work. As an example, Becker (1982) notes that to perform a piece of music requires, among other things, the invention and manufacturing of instruments, a means of communicating the specificity of the work to the performers, and an audience willing and trained to listen to the performance. In its simplest form, Becker (1974:768) states that the requirements to produce a work include

conceiving the idea for the work, making the necessary physical artifacts, creating a conventional language of expression, training artistic personnel and audiences to use the conventional language of expression to create and experience, and providing the necessary mixture of those ingredients for a particular work or performance.

These requirements preclude the necessity of cooperative networks to facilitate the completion of works of art. This is completed by way of a division of labor between the artist and their support personnel.

According to Becker, the differentiation between the activities of the artist and those of the support personnel are dependent on the perceived level of skill involved. Those activities considered to require special talent to complete are reserved for the artist, while the more routine activities are delegated to the support personnel. This distinction is not fixed; activities considered to be in the domain of the support personnel may, over time, transition into the purview of the artist. Becker (1982) provides the example of the recording engineer and sound mixer – with the advent of technology capable of reproducing higher quality sound, greater skill was necessary to utilize these technologies, thus placing the task into the realm of the artist.

The fluid nature of the activities designated to be completed by the artist and the support personnel brings into question the level of involvement the artist is required to have in the completion of their work. Becker (1974:769) concludes that this question is “a matter of consensual definition” of the art world that the artist belongs to. Thus, a composer can create a work of music without playing it, and an architect can design a structure without building it. The activities not completed by the artist become the responsibility of their support personnel.

Conventions

Artistic divisions of labor are facilitated by the use of conventions – agreed upon ways of working within a particular art world (Becker 1974). Becker (1990:499) states

that conventions are “what sociologists had in mind when they talked about folkways, norms, culture, shared understandings, or any of the many other words we use to talk about how people manage to do things together.” Thus, conventions are ways for artists to realize an idea through the help of support personnel in an accepted and practical manner. As Becker (1976:704) notes, “conventions make possible the cooperative activities through which the world’s products come about, and make them possible with a relatively low investment of time and energy.”

While these conventions are beneficial to the artist, they also constrain and limit their work. Becker (1974) notes that the constraints placed upon the artist by the use of conventions are increased as a result of a complex network of interdependent connections built around them. As a result, the creation of works of art outside the scope of conventions may require significant changes to the entire art making process. This results in an increase in the level of difficulty in completing the work and a decrease in the size of the audience receptive to the work. The benefit to the artist of shirking conventions, however, is more freedom over the finished product.

As artists forego the conventions of their art field in favor of new and unique directions, their works serve to create new conventions. Gaye Tuchman (1983:337) notes, “[t]he new ‘unconventional systems’ will also be replete with conventions, which are themselves formed out of the intersection of social and economic forces.” Over time, the investment of time and energy result in support personnel capable of facilitating the creation of these new conventions. Furthermore, as the exposure to these new conventions increase, the audience becomes more familiarized and conditioned to the art

world's newest conventions. These changes may occur gradually, as artists make minor changes to their work to continue eliciting a response from the audience. Sometimes, as with the example of Impressionism, these changes may disrupt the entire system of an art world, breaking existing conventions and shifting the aesthetic towards new forms of expression. (Becker 1974). It is through these changes that new art worlds develop over time.

Resources

Becker describes the resources available and necessary to produce art as being in one of two categories – material resources or personnel. The availability of resources is a necessary consideration in the sustainability of an art world. As Becker (1982:69) notes, “the distribution system, by making available some kinds of materials and personnel and not others, makes the works which rely on easily gotten resources more likely than those for which resources are more difficult to get.” Therefore, the constraints of the distribution system become the constraints of the art world.

The more specialized the material resources required by an art world, the closer the cooperative links between the distribution system and the art world. Some artists create their work using consumer products, and their reliance on these products reduces the constraints placed upon them by the conventions of more specialized art worlds. For example, the material resources necessary for a writer (e.g., writing instruments, paper products, word processors) are readily available, and the differences between the resources available to a writer place little constraint on the production of their work. Other artists utilize industrial or commercial products which, while still widely produced

and distributed, are more specialized than consumer products and therefore not as familiar to artists. Some distribution systems produce materials specific to an art world and are thereby necessary to the sustainability of that art world. For example, Becker (1982:73) notes “[i]nstrument makers are permanent members of the art world.” However, the specialization of material resources used by an art world reinforce the constraints imposed by the art world.

The second category of resources available to an artist is personnel. Here, Becker (1982:77) delineates between the “artist” and their “support personnel,” noting “the person who does the ‘real work,’ making the choices that give the work its artistic importance and integrity is the artist ... everyone else’s job is to assist the artist.” As such, the sustainability of an art world requires the availability of adequately skilled support personnel to maintain a steady production. The artist’s reliance on support personnel can at times present either opportunities or constraints to the production of art, depending on the skill-level of those willing and able to assist.

Types of artists

Becker (1976) organizes artists based on the degree to which they participate in the collective action of their ascribed art world. The parameters for these categories range from artists that are fully imbedded in their respective art world, to artists with little or no connection to the art world at all. In defining these artists, Becker (1976) uses the terms *integrated professionals*, *mavericks*, *naïve artists*, and *folk artist*. The method of categorizing artists by the degree to which they are connected to their art worlds, Becker

(1976) asserts, can be just as easily applied to understanding the organization of other kinds of social connections.

An artist who is fully integrated into their art world, utilizing the connections and conventions within it, would be considered an *integrated professional* (Becker 1976). In this category, everyone and everything involved – from the artist, their support personnel and their supplies, to the audience and location for the exhibition or performance – have been prepared with a high degree of expertise representative of the conventions within an art world. Becker (1976) terms the work produced under these conditions as “canonical,” meaning they fully represent an art world’s highest values. Due to the level of expertise exhibited by the individuals involved in the production of such a work, its creation can be achieved with minimum difficulty.

While the decrease in effort required by the *integrated professional* to create their work is generally understood as being a positive aspect, these artists are still expected to maintain their originality. That is, a strict adherence to the art world’s conventions at the expense of innovation results in “hack work,” or creations that fail to generate interest from those involved. Therefore, the *integrated professional* is expected to create works that contain enough variation to remain interesting yet utilize the established conventions that make realizing the works as effortless as possible.

When an artist comes to find the conventions of their art world too constraining to continue adhering to them, they can be considered a *maverick* (Becker 1976). While this choice to eschew conventions results in a degree of freedom over their work, the *maverick* loses the connection to the art world and the ability to participate in its

organized activities. The indifference to conventions also makes fully realizing their work impossible, as the *maverick* no longer has the support personnel the work would require. Having lost the connection to the art worlds organized activities, the *maverick* is responsible for the distribution of their work.

Becker (1976) categorizes artists with no formal training or art world connections as *naïve artists*. These artists typically work without the aid of cooperative links provided by art worlds and “must create their own network of cooperation – recruiting, training, and maintaining a group of people who gradually learn what is needed and how to do it” (Becker 1976:711–12). In lieu of formal training in the arts, these artist repurpose skills learned “in nonartistic settings and for utilitarian purposes,” such as a construction worker using their skills to create sculptures (Becker 1976:713). For Becker, the feature that distinguishes the *naïve artist* from the *integrated professional* or the *maverick* is not the quality of the art itself, but rather the absence of any perceivable influence of an established art world on the production of art.

On the furthest end of Becker’s (1976:714) artist typologies is the *folk artist*, for which “no professional art community exists” and “what is done is not really thought of as art at all, at least not by any of the people involved in its production.” Becker (1976:715) provides as examples of *folk artists* the quilt making traditions of mountain women and the women potters of Oaxaca – a community exists to support the production of the works and standards are established that determine the quality of the works, but “[t]he notion of a unique and artistic connection between artist and art work simply

[does] not exist.” For Becker, the feature that distinguishes the *folk artist* from the other categories is the production of works for utilitarian rather than aesthetic purposes.

Artist typologies such as those employed by Becker can be problematic in their distinctions between “art” and “non-art”. Feminist scholars have observed that often these distinctions reproduce inequalities based on race, class, and gender. In “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews (1987:332) note that, through the creation of hierarchical categories such as “high art” and “low art”, the “female creative output that conveyed a female experience had been invalidated as art and relegated to the category of ‘craft’. The relegation of women’s art to the category of “craft” has been documented by other art historians, such as Patricia Mainardi’s (1982) examination of the quilt making traditions of the early Americas.

Distribution systems

Becker (1982:94) describes distribution systems as “intermediaries who handle the movement of work between artists and audiences.” Art worlds may employ one or several distribution systems operating concurrently. Distribution systems vary in the level of connection to “legitimate” art worlds, as well as the amount of influence they exert on the production of art. Regarding influence, Becker situates distribution systems within two extremes – the self-supported artist and the patron-supported artist.

Self-supported artists do not rely on a distribution system to sustain their art. These artists often have secondary work, or are supported by a spouse or inheritance. As such, self-supported artists are not as constrained by the conventions of an art world as an artist reliant on an art world’s distribution system to finance their work, though Becker

notes that this does not deter self-supported artists from utilizing those distribution systems. Self-supported artists will work together to distribute their art – through the sharing of expenses such as studio space, or the organization of alternative galleries for artists rejected from traditional galleries. However, the further disconnected from an art world’s distribution system a self-supported artist is, the more likely their art is to be viewed as “non-serious” within the art world.

Artists working with a patronage system experience the greatest level of influence imposed by a distribution system over the production of their art. The relationship between an artist and patron is seen as mutually beneficial – the artist gets to present their work in prestigious spaces that will grow their reputation, and the patron gets to showcase their elevated status and further their public image. Patrons can be wealthy individuals, religious organizations, corporations, or government entities. While in an ideal patronage system, artist and patron share similar views and can agree on the conventions used to produce art, Becker notes that the views of contemporary patrons are often in conflict with those of the artists they support.

Becker groups the distribution systems that fall outside self-supported artist systems and the patronage systems as public sale systems, notably dealers and impresarios. Dealers “integrate the artist into the society’s economy by transforming aesthetic value into economic value” primarily through the use of a gallery (1982:109). This transformation is facilitated by the work of critics, who generate interest in an artist’s work. Successful galleries provide the dealer and the artists they represent with the financial compensation to continue operating, and it increases the social ranking of

the critics who evaluated the work. Dealers maintain close connections with collectors, often serving as informal instructors on the aesthetics and artistic conventions of an artist's work.

The public sale of performance art differs from that of other arts in that the art being sold is not a tangible object, but rather an experience. Therefore, an audience does not purchase the art itself, but rather entry into the space of the performance. The nature of this art necessitates the audience purchase tickets to enter the space before the performance, rather than after its conclusion. The organizing of these events is handled by impresarios. Becker (1982:119) notes that impresarios “rent the space the performance will take place in, do the necessary advertising, sell tickets, handle finances, and make sure that necessary auxiliary personnel are there.” The relationship between an impresario and the audience is less personal than the relationship dealers have with collectors.

Activism, Community and Art

The word activism was first used in 1920 in the political sense of “advocating energetic action” (Douglas Harper 2016). Activism generally means using forms of action to bring about political or social change. This “energetic action” can be expressed by individuals making choices that reflect their beliefs, and by groups coming together to create social movements. It is important to note that different forms of activism are not isolated from one another; often activists and social movements employ a variety of methods to reach their goals. While theorizing “collective behavior” can apply to a single

action, as we theorize “activism” and “social movements” we are theorizing sustained collective behavior to achieve a particular goal.

Social movements typically coalesce around specific issues and direct their “energetic action” towards the attainment of specific solutions. This approach of focusing solely on certain issues can be problematic, as it fails to address the interconnectedness of all political and social issues, thus inadvertently creating what Robert Bothwell (2005:122) describes as “barriers to permeation and cross-issue connections,” whereby organizations are siloed off from one another and “fail to work with stakeholders outside of their traditional networks,” thereby limiting the long-term viability of their actions. Some social movements, such as Environmental Justice, take a more holistic approach that “represents the transformation of more reactive, disorganized, and individualized forms” of activism “to more proactive, coordinated, and collective forms” of activism (Faber and McCarthy 2005:176).

The forms of activism implemented by social movements can be problematic for other reasons as well. Activists sometimes fall into what carla bergman (2017:Introduction) calls “rigid radicalism,” where “radicalism becomes an ideal, and everyone becomes deficient in comparison.” bergman further describes rigid radicalism as

[t]he anxious posturing, the vigilant search for mistakes and limitations, the hostility that crushes a hesitant new idea, the way that critique becomes a reflex, the sense that things are urgent yet pointless, the circulation of the latest article tearing apart bad habits and behaviors, the way shaming others becomes comfortable, the ceaseless generation of necessities and duties, the sense of feeling guilty about one’s own fear and loneliness, the clash of political views that

requires a winner and a loser, the performance of anti-oppressive language, the way that some stare at the floor or look at the door.

This perceived deficiency of both self and others can restrict a movement's creativity and capacity to challenge what bergman (2017:Introduction) calls "Empire" or "the organized destruction under which we live." Often, social movements inadvertently reflect and reproduce the existing conditions that they are challenging on a structural level. In *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne maree brown (2017:52) describes the organizational structure of many social movements, noting that they "have singular charismatic leaders, top down structures, money-driven programs, destructive methods of engaging conflict, unsustainable work cultures, and little to no impact on the issues at hand."

This type of organizational structure is emblematic of the professionalization of activism and the development of the non-profit industrial complex, or NPIC (Smith 2017). The need to support the movement financially often leads to seeking funding from "movement outsiders" (Ostrander, Silver, and McCarthy 2005), particularly large foundations, who are "cautious and apolitical" and have no desire to "fundamentally restructure society" (Dowie 2002:218). Over time, the reliance on funding can lead to movement being co-opted by the NPIC (Smith 2017).

These problems have been widely discussed and written about, and various strategies have been developed to address them. To remedy the effects of "rigid radicalism," bergman (2017) suggests exercising "joyful militancy." This concept is described as "a fierce commitment to emergent forms of life in the cracks of Empire, and the values, responsibilities, and questions that sustain them" (bergman

2017:Introduction). This concept is similar to what adrienne maree brown (2017:24) describes as emergent strategy, or “how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.” This concept is further broken down into elements – fractal, adaptative, interdependence and decentralization, non-linear and iterative, resilience and transformative justice, and creating more possibilities. Each of these elements suggests a way for social justice activists to better organize. Central to the brown’s concept of emergent strategy is social change as a community effort, as brown (2017:226) notes “[w]e must be the values that we say we’re struggling for and we must be justice, be peace, be community.”

Community activism can be described as “[a]ctivities which arise from the actions of local communities of place or interest, and which are directed towards advancing or impeding social, political or economic change” (Bowl, White, and McCabe 2015:1). These activities include “social centres, food cooperatives, housing cooperatives, building communities putting on events and promoting alternative ideas” (Permanent Culture Now 2011:1).

As with other forms of activism, community activism faces several challenges. Community activism can be harmful to a community when the activism comes from outside the community (Illich 1968). Activists may lack the understanding necessary to work with a community, especially where there is a power imbalance. This can lead to community activists providing little or no real help, and even doing more harm than good. Community activism can also be coopted by “movement outsiders” – charitable

organizations that “neither benefit from nor participate in movement action” (Ostrander et al. 2005:274). This can result in small changes that do not address real problems, knowledge extraction, or a dependency on outside funding and the constraints it entails, among other problems (Bowl et al. 2015). Ideally, as described by Teaching Tolerance (2017:1), community activism “provides a way for people to work together to solve a problem in their neighborhood, town or city.” This emphasis on individuals working together to identify and address problems in their own communities is a primary feature of DIY communities.

Art activism

Art activism generally means “art that is grounded in the act of ‘doing’ and addresses political or social issues” (Tate n.d.:1). Critical theorist Reiland Rabaka (2011) traces the role of art and in the social movements of the United States to the Harlem Renaissance. Art historian Tom Finkelppearl (2013:7) further traces its development alongside the social movements of the 1960s, noting,

[i]n my conversations with progressive activists and artists, one after another they mention that they participated in, based their techniques on, or drew inspiration from the spirit of the 1960s, particularly the civil rights movement, the counterculture, and feminism.

In “On Art Activism”, Boris Groys (2014:1) describes art activism as “the ability of art to function as an arena and medium for political protest and social activism.” Groys (2014:1) goes on to state that “[a]rt activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions ... they want to change these conditions by means of art.”

In *This is Not Art*, Alana Jelinek (2013:3) argues that, like other forms of activism, art activism has the capacity to challenge neoliberal values, but that capacity is often stifled through an “inadvertent internalization of its values.” Furthermore, Jelinek (2013:4) states that most contemporary art “maintains rather than undermines the status quo and particularly the neoliberal structures that privilege and enable the few over the many.” One reason for this is the “hidden assumptions within contemporary activist art practices” that imagine a “binary model of power in which one class has all the power ... while the rest are oppressed” (Jelinek 2013:8). These assumptions are based on a Marxist powerful-powerless dichotomy, which Jelinek argues undermines the artists’ understanding of a Foucauldian sense of power as constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and truth.

Like other forms of activism, problems arising from the internalization of neoliberal values take on a variety of symptoms. Similar to bergman’s concept of rigid radicalism, Bishop (2005:180) notes,

[w]hat serious criticism has arisen in relation to socially collaborative art has been framed in a particular way: The social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism. This is manifest in a heightened attention to how a given collaboration is undertaken. In other words, artists are increasingly judged by their working process—the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration—and criticized for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to “fully” represent their subjects, as if such a thing were possible. This emphasis on process over product (i.e., means over ends) is justified as oppositional to capitalism’s predilection for the contrary.

At the same time that art activism is critiqued for its failure as activism, it is also critiqued for its failure as art. Speaking chiefly of feminist artwork, Amy Mullin (2003:189) states that it is “[r]arely considered ‘real art’ or ‘aesthetically good,’

mainstream critics single out feminist art work as evidence of the less than salutary effects of allowing group identity politics to interfere with or determine artistic goals and aspirations.” For some, the introduction of political or social elements within art diminishes the role of the art itself. Mullin (2003:189) states that socially engaged artworks “are frequently either dismissed for their illegitimate combination of the aesthetic and the political, or embraced as chiefly political.” This debate within the art world as to whether art should address political or social issues or should exist outside of the social realm is described by Jelinek (2013) as the art-life dichotomy.

Similar to social movements increasing dependence on large foundations, the art world has come to rely on, and even reproduce, the “economic and political structures of neoliberalism” (Jelinek 2013:17). This permeation of neoliberal values within the contemporary artworld is evidenced by the financial sector’s increasing importance within the artworld (Jelinek 2013). Within these economic and political structures, art is increasingly “defined and valued by either the market (valued for its price as a commodity) or the state (valued for its usefulness) (Jelinek 2013:8). To counter the effects of neoliberalism in the valuation of art activism, Jelinek (2013) reminds artists that they create and define art and therefore determine its value.

Art activism theorists have used a broad range of concepts to distinguish types of art activism. In “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents” Clair Bishop (2005:179, emphasis original) notes,

[t]his expanded field of relational practices currently goes by a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art.

These practices are less interested in a relational *aesthetic* than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity.

In *Living as Form*, Nato Thompson surveyed more than 100 projects created between 1991 and 2011 of socially engaged art and artists. Thompson (2012:19) concluded that socially engaged art is

not an art movement. Rather these cultural practices indicate a new social order – ways of life that emphasize participation, challenge power, and span disciplines ranging from urban planning and community work to theater and the visual arts.

Thompson provides four interrelated ways to conceptualize socially engaged art (and other related fields of art activism) as ways of life – 1) anti-representational; 2) participatory; 3) situated in the real; and 4) operating in the political sphere.

Anti-representational art is “living,” performative, and action-based. Helguera (2011:7) notes “[m]ost artists who produce socially engaged works are interested in creating a kind of collective art that impacts the public sphere in a deep and meaningful way, not in creating a representation – like a theatrical play – of a social issue.” Artist Tania Bruguera (2011) states “I don’t want an art that points at a thing, I want an art that is the thing.” An example of action based socially engaged art is Women on Waves. Founded in 1999 by physician Rebecca Gomperts, the organization operates a ship, designed by Dutch artist Joep Van Lieshout, that provides safe and legal abortion services to women who live in countries where the procedure is illegal (Lambert-Beatty 2008; Worrell 2012). Their operation subverts the laws of countries where abortion is illegal by anchoring in international waters; the ship itself is registered in the

Netherlands, where abortion is legal. In describing the artistic merits of this project, art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2008:313) notes,

Women on Waves is moored to the artistic in a surprising number of ways. Start with the act of radical imagination at the core of the project: the idea that the dominion of one nation-state over the bodies of its women could be evaded by a short trip on a boat registered in another. Outrageous in its simplicity as well as its implications, using international waters as a refuge for women's rights, in particular, unfurls into a poetic series of associations. It literalizes the metaphor of waves that we use to describe the generations of feminism and links it to old images that associate dangerous female power and the sea – from sirens and mermaids to the female pirates Ann Bonny and Mary Read. Meanwhile it takes on the traditional associations of women and ships, invariably referred to as “she.” In the eighteenth century, shipwrecks were even called miscarriages (Ditz 1994).

Additionally, while in port, the ship holds a variety of workshops that cater to doctors as well as artists and writers. Anti-representational art, like Women on Waves, directly confronts social and political issues. The performative aspect of this confrontation creates a dialogue between the artists and their audience.

Participatory art requires the audience to participate instead of observing. In the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Tom Finkelpearl states (2014:1) “[i]n some cases, participation by a range of people creates an artwork, in others the participatory action is itself described as the art.” Claire Bishop (2005:1) notes in *The Social Turn* that “the creative energy of participatory practices rehumanizes – or at least de-alienates – a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalism.” Helguera (2011) notes successive levels of participation, ranging from Nominal participation (the visitor or viewer in contemplation of the work), to Collaborative participation (the visitor shares responsibility for realizing the work). Francis Alÿs’ (2002) project titled ‘When Faith Moves Mountains’ provides an example of the

participatory aspect of socially engaged art. For the project, Francis enlisted 500 students to walk in a line up a sand dune on the outskirts of the city. As they went across the dune, they would use shovels to dig into the sand until they reached the other side. By the time they all crossed the dune, they had displaced it several centimeters. Art historian David Hopkins (2000:261) notes,

Alj's himself noted that the motto underlying the piece was 'maximum effort, minimum result', suggesting that the piece allegorized a social situation in Latin America, where 'minimal reforms are achieved through massive collective action'.

The involvement of the audience in the production of art is also a central characteristic of artist's works in the field of experimental communities. As Carlos Basualdo and Reinaldo Laddaga (2009:209) state that experimental communities "involve the construction of environments where artist and not-artists come together to produce representations and communities." Basualdo and Laddaga (2009:208) assert that experimental communities operate under the

assumption that where a large number of individuals with access to different types of knowledge converge, a situation is created whose complexity is impossible for individuals to attain. This condition allows for the development of a practical conception of society in which a human group takes form through a learning process carried out by means of a sustained conversation between its members.

In describing the features of participatory art, Bishop (2005) claims that "[t]he intersubjective space created through these projects becomes the focus – and medium – of artistic investigation."

Art that is "situated in the real" locates itself in the public realm, as opposed to existing in a museum or art gallery. The projects of WochenKlausur, an Austrian based

art group, are good examples of socially engaged art locating itself in the public realm. Their first project aimed to take on the issue of homelessness by remodeling a bus into a “multi-purpose ambulance” (WochenKlausur 1993). The group lobbied the government to provide a physician to work with the bus. According to the group’s website, their project has provided medical aid for more than 700 homeless people a month (WochenKlausur 2007). In 1998, the original van was replaced by a larger van. The project has been taken over by the relief organization Caritas. In an interview, Manfred Rainer (Öllinger and Rainer 2014:1), a member of WochenKlausur, described the artistic merits of the intervention, stating “[i]t is not the bus as a material implementation which is the artwork. It is the fact, that a solution was created. This is the artwork!” In describing the art of WochenKlausur and other socially engaged artists, Grant Kester (2005:78) asserts,

[t]hese projects mark the emergence of a body of contemporary art practice concerned with collaborative, and potentially emancipatory, forms of dialogue and conversation. While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers this typically occurs in response to a finished object. In these projects conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is re-framed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse.

WochenKlausur operates directly with/in the public sphere creating art that “is no longer seen as a formal act but as an intervention into society” (WochenKlausur 2005:1).

The public sphere as a site of artistic interventions is a key characteristic of littoral art. Bruce Barber (1998:1), who coined the term littoral art as a metaphor for the range of “cultural projects that are undertaken predominantly outside the conventional contexts of the institutionalized art world”, has written several essays about his theory of these

artforms. He asserts socially engaged artwork is rooted in Jurgen Habermas' notion of Communicative Action (Barber 2017). Barber (2017:1) states,

the art of giving, and its associated 'modalities'- conform in many ways to what the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas could acknowledge as forms of communicative action, aimed at the progressive de-colonisation of the life world, and even perhaps, the inauguration of what Habermas idealised as 'the good and the true life'.

In his "Sentences on Littoral Art," Barber (1998:1) includes the work of Karl Marx as an influence, stating "Littoral artists acknowledge Marx's injunction in his 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, that it is not up to philosophers (artists) to simply interpret (represent) the world; the point is to change it."

In "Dialogical aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art," Kester (1999) claims that littoral art is a community-based demonstration of Nicolas Bourriaud's (1998:113) concept of Relational Aesthetics, defined as "[a] set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space." This concept focuses on the collaborative nature of art, stating that the artworks create a space for artists and audience to come together in a shared moment as a community (Bourriaud 1998).

Art that operates in the political sphere challenges systems of oppression and political injustice. Amy Mullin (2003:199) notes in *Feminist Art and the Social Imagination* that the "[a]ctivist artists, like other activists, need to demonstrate familiarity with the issues and problems with which they are concerned, and to this end they must often engage in sociological research ... The need to be familiar with issues, to do sociological research, and to confront a topic from a variety of perspectives are a

common feature of the modus operandi of activist artists.” Peggy Diggs’ (1992) project titled Domestic Milk Carton Project is a good example of the political aspect of socially engaged art. For this project, Diggs conducted research on domestic violence and interviewed rape counselors, police officers, women's advocates, shelter workers, and others to better understand the psychological and sociological aspects of the issue. The project consisted of milk cartons with information about domestic violence on one side. Mullin (2003:198) notes that Diggs “chose milk cartons because they are so commonly found in the home, and because no one expects to find a political work on a milk carton.” As a result of the project, Diggs was asked by then Senator Joe Biden to speak at a congressional hearing on domestic violence (Diggs 2016).

DIY community and art activism

In “Rise of the Expert Amateur: DIY Projects, Communities, and Cultures” Stacey Kuznetsov and Eric Paulos (2010:1) define Do-It-Yourself as “any creation, modification or repair of objects without the aid of paid professionals.” Sarah Lowndes (2018) notes DIY is characterized by two components – it is initiated by creative practitioners and is not wholly commercial. This concept encompasses everything from simple home repair to running a pirate radio station or publishing a zine. The culture surrounding DIY emphasizes both the importance of self-reliance and the benefits of participating in a collaborative community. Lowndes notes collaborative aspect of DIY is reflected in the emergence of DIT (Do It Together).

Kuznetsov and Paulos trace contemporary DIY community to amateur radio hobbyists in the 1920’s. Kristen Haring (2007:20) describes the culture surrounding

amateur radio, noting “Hams formed a community through the same general practices of other social groups. They set conditions for membership, established rules of conduct, taught values, and developed a specialized vocabulary known only to insiders.” The culture of amateur radio persisted even through a ban on amateur radio communications during WWII. Kuznetsov and Paulos (2010:1) note the “[r]ebellious attitudes continued to pervade pirate radio stations of the 1960’s and handmade ‘zines’ expressing the punk aesthetic in the 1970’s.”

Most writing on the history of DIY traces the development of the terminology to the early 1950s (see, Lankshear and Knobel 2010; Lowndes 2018; Wehr 2012). During this time, the term DIY is used to mainly describe aspects of home improvement. As noted by Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2010:5),

[e]arly uses made particular reference to people (by implication, mainly males) undertaking maintenance, repair or modification work on major investment items like homes and vehicles, without (necessarily) having the specialized training or expertise associated with that work.

During this stage, the development of DIY grew in connection with the development of the suburban lifestyle, as Lankshear and Knobel state (2010:6, emphasis original), “more specialized *tools* and *knowledge* became more readily accessible ... allowing ordinary people to entertain the idea of pursuing what had hitherto been specialized *tasks*.” These analyses of early DIY present a classist narrative, overlooking the fact that for some individuals (e.g., rural, poor, and working-class families) DIY was not a new phenomenon. Rather, the basic concept of DIY was part of everyday life.

The introduction of affordable technologies has led to the development of a variety of DIY subcultures. Kuznetsoy and Paulos (2010) note the development of cheap music equipment in the 1980s led to forms of electronic music pioneered by self-taught musicians. As historian Tricia Rose (Rose 1994:7) notes,

[i]n the 1980s, the trickle-down effect of technological advances in electronics brought significantly expanded access to mixing, dubbing, and copying equipment for consumers and black marked retailers. Clearly, these advances provided aspiring musicians with greater access to recording and copying equipment at less expense.

The increasing affordability of computers also allowed people to experiment with various software thereby paving the way for the hacker subculture – defined as “[people who enjoy] exploring the details of programmable systems and how to stretch their capabilities” (Raymond 2003:1).

The DIY movement has been interpreted differently by the various people who have written about it, and their interpretations reflect their own beliefs as much as it does the movement itself. Sandra Jeppesen (2012:265) asserts that DIY activism inherently stems from an anarchist standpoint, noting “direct democracy, participation, cooperation, collective self-determination, taking action to create change, mutual respect, long-term accountability, and lived social equality” as some of its core values. Lowndes (2018) states that DIY is grounded in democratic socialism and is motivated by community collaboration instead of profit. Hemphill and Leskowitz (2013) emphasize the values of self-sufficiency and knowledge sharing in DIY communities, describing DIY communities as attempts to create “alternatives to mainstream consumerism.”

In *DIY: The Search for Control and Self-Reliance in the 21st Century*, Kevin Wehr (2012) describes three levels of participation in the DIY movement – individuals acting on their own, called “DIY individualists;” individuals who participate in a community, called “DIY coordinators;” and individuals who look at DIY as a way of life, called “DIY lifestylers.” Aside from the DIY individualists, there is usually a high degree of collaboration and knowledge sharing among participants of a DIY community – groups of like-minded individuals who organize (either in person, online or a combination of the two) around shared interests. This focus on community over individual has led some groups to use the term Do It Together (DIT).

As the DIY movement grew, it became an avenue for activism. In “Strategies, Action Repertoires and DIY Activism in the Animal Rights Movement,” Lyle Munro states,

DIY came out of the Direct Action movement of the 1990s and follows in the tradition of non-violent direct action espoused by the radical environmentalist group Earth First! (EF!). One of the slogans of EF! Activists is ‘DIY! – if not you, who?’

Rather than look to social institutions to bring about social and political change, DIY activists sought to create the change themselves. In “DiY Culture: Notes Towards and Intro,” George McKay (1998:3) notes,

Unlike other more straightforwardly cultural moments of resistance, such as say 1970s punk and 1980s anarchopunk, there is a tremendous emphasis in DiY Culture laid on actually doing something in the social or political realm, and rarely is that something as banal as traditional forms of mobilization like marching on a demo and shouting in ragged unison ‘Maggie Maggie Maggie— OUT OUT OUT!’

The activist side of the DIY movement can be traced back as far as 1957, with the formation of Situationist International (SI) (Downes 2007). According to Sadie Plant (Plant 2002:1), “[t]he situationists characterized modern capitalist society as an organization of spectacles: a frozen moment of history in which it is impossible to experience real life or actively participate in the construction of the lived world.” The situationists revolted against the spectacle of capitalist culture through a variety of methods, including the creation of journals, posters, and cartoon strips. This influence can be seen in the methods used by DIY art activists today, particularly through the use of zines within DIY communities.

Stephen Duncombe (2008) notes that zines were first created in the 1930s by science fiction fans as a way to share ideas with one another. Defined as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves,” zines were originally hand copied onto sheets of paper, although today zines are also created and transmitted digitally over the internet, thus allowing for the information to spread more rapidly (Duncombe 2008:10). The ease with which anyone can create and share zines allows for the transmission of ideas that might otherwise not have an outlet. Jeppesen (2012) notes that zines are legitimated from within the DIY community – through both circulation (materially and symbolically) and by copying or incorporating information into other zines. This allows for a creator’s ideas to be adapted and evolve over time.

DIY community can be seen as a representation of many of adrienne maree brown's (2017) elements of emergent strategy. The concept of DIY community as a non-hierarchical and anticapitalistic structure that values equality, direct action and long-term accountability resembles brown's (2017:53) concept of "fractals," the understanding that "*what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system.*" By working to create a space outside of the neoliberal framework, DIY communities actively resists the problems faced by social movements – namely how to work within and against neoliberalism without inadvertently reproducing it. The values of DIY communities – self-sufficiency and cooperation, collective self-determination, and taking action to create change – echo brown's (2017:70) concept of "intentional adaptation," the "process of changing while staying in touch with our deeper purpose and longing." Respecting individual autonomy while appreciating cooperation and actively sharing knowledge and ideas illustrates DIY communities' capacity for interdependence and decentralization.

Conclusion

The art worlds concepts developed by Howard Becker helped to develop my analytical framework of DIY art collectives by providing the basic concepts of collective action as they apply to the production of art. Through this framework, we can examine DIY art collectives as a group of individuals working together in cooperative links, sharing conventions and resources to produce their works. However, this framework is not adequate in analyzing the motivations for establishing and maintaining membership in a DIY art collective. Examining DIY art collectives through the lens of social

movements and art activism provided this insight. The collective action of social movements is motivated by a desire for social and political change. Likewise, art activism and its various related genres emphasize the role of art in addressing social and political issues. Finally, the existing literature on DIY provided a basis for understanding the movements development and the unique characteristics of the communities it represents. In the following Chapter, I will discuss the research methods that I used to study two DIY art collectives in the Pacific Northwest.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This thesis is based on 200 hours of participant observation and four in-depth interviews conducted between 2017 and 2019 with two arts and music collectives in the Pacific Northwest. This ethnography explores the collaborative process of members of a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) art collective as understood through a collective action lens. I analyzed the elements of these “art worlds” using frameworks outlined by Howard Becker (1976). In this chapter I discuss the process of getting involved with the collectives and provide a detailed description of the settings. In addition, I theorize my membership role, describe the techniques I used to analyze the data, and discuss the ethical and epistemological challenges faced in my research.

Getting Involved

I learned of the Songbird Collective (pseudonym) through a colleague with whom I had been discussing my research ideas. After finding out more information about the Songbird Collective through their website, I contacted them through their group email. Through this initial contact, I explained my research ideas and my interest in participating in the collective. The Songbird Collective was receptive and informed me of the day and time of the upcoming meeting. Later, in my research, another colleague told me about another DIY art collective, the Earth Dance Collective (pseudonym), and provided me with one of the member’s contact information. Similar to my process for getting involved with the Songbird Collective, I contacted the member of the Earth Dance Collective

referred to me by my colleague after finding out more information through their website and invited me to attend the upcoming meeting.

The Setting

I began working with the Songbird Collective in November 2017. Finding the collective's space for the first meeting was somewhat difficult. In an area outside of the city's downtown, I made my way through streets I had never driven on and found places I had never seen before, only to realize when I arrived that I had taken a rather circuitous route. Once I found a place to park and looked around, I realized that I was only one street over from places that were more familiar to me.

Walking in to the space for the first time, I was comforted at how familiar it felt – reminding me of similar spaces I had been to in my past experiences on the East Coast. The interior's aesthetic seemed to project a DIY mentality - everything looked as though it was either donated to the space or put together by volunteers and members of the collective. Through the entrance, there was an art-gallery-meets-gift-shop. Art of various media – paintings, drawings, sculpture, jewelry and postcards – intermingled with potted plants, records and shirts. Alongside one wall was a table with information for other local nonprofits and upcoming events. As I walked further into the building towards the sound of people's voices, I noticed an area with bookcases full of zines – handmade magazines made by artists and activists – as well as copies of *Earth First! News* and papers from other activist organizations.

I was nervous going into the first meeting. My anxiety, however, lessened once I began talking to the other people at the meeting. As the meeting began, I introduced

myself; one person commented that they read my email and were the one to respond to it. For the first meeting, I decided to mostly listen and find out more about the Collective.

The primary emphasis of the Songbird Collective is the planning and utilization of their space for events. These events vary in scope from small events coordinated by only a few members to larger events involving artists from outside of the collective. I was interested in learning more about the steps involved in the collaborative process of planning and utilizing the space for events.

My introduction to the Earth Dance Collective began in May 2018. After communicating with one of the members through email, they invited me to a meeting. Located in the downtown area, finding the building was easier than it had been for the Songbird Collective. The Collective's space is in a building with other offices. As I walked past a law office, I started to question if I was in the right place until a member of the Collective, probably recognizing the confused look on my face, helped me out. The interior of the Earth Dance Collective's space was much different from the Songbird Collective's. The space consisted of one large room with high ceilings, mostly bare walls, and wood floors. Along the walls were long pews. Large windows opening onto the city street filled the room in natural light. Much of the space was open, allowing for the members – a performance art group – to practice for their events.

As with my first experience with the Songbird Collective, my anxiety about meeting the collective lessened once I began talking with the members. Over the course of the meeting, I listened as the members discussed the logistics of planning their next event along with the routine tasks associated with keeping the space open.

Membership Roles and Field Research

Many authors have conceptualized researcher membership roles – or the range of relationships between the researcher and their study participants. A researcher’s membership role influences the information they are able to gather, their perspective on the research setting, and participant attitudes about the researcher. Adler and Adler have conceptualized membership roles in field research ranging from peripheral membership to complete membership (1987). Adler and Adler (1987:36) describe the peripheral role as being “the most marginal and least committed to the social world studied.” The researcher may choose this role for various reasons. They may feel that being too connected to the group they are studying may interfere with their ability to objectively interpret their findings. A researcher may also choose a peripheral role because they do not want to participate – as in the case of researchers studying deviance. Adler and Adler also note that a researcher may also be placed in the peripheral role by the group being studied. That is, researchers may be blocked from assuming more involved roles within the group based on a perceived incompatibility between themselves and the researcher.

On the other end of Adler and Adler’s membership spectrum is complete membership. Adler and Adler (1987:67) note,

complete-member-researchers (CMRs) immerse themselves fully in the group as “natives.” They and their subjects relate to each other as status equals, dedicated to sharing in a common set of experiences, feelings, and goals. As a result, CMRs come closest of all researchers to approximating the emotional stance of the people they study. CMR’s genuine commitment to the group, and the members’ awareness of this, diminishes the need for role pretense. In conducting their research, then, CMRs often adopt the overt role.

Adler and Adler note that their description of the role is an ideal, and that the actuality of being a complete member is more varied. They place the role of the complete member along a spectrum designating the researcher's immersion in the social world being studied – ranging from partial (still connected to their world outside the group) to complete (disconnecting completely from their previous world). Within the category of complete membership, Adler and Adler note two distinct subtypes – the “opportunistic” studying groups in which they are already a member of, and the “convert” studying groups and becoming a member through the process.

Similar to Adler and Adler's description, ethnographer James Spradley (2016) places membership roles along a spectrum ranging from nonparticipation to complete participation. Nonparticipation can also be described as complete observation. The researcher does not interact with the subjects of their research and may not even come into contact with the individuals they are studying. Spradley notes content analysis of television programming as a clear example of nonparticipation in ethnographic research.

On the other end of Spradley's participation spectrum are active and complete participation. Through active participation, the researcher learns through the process of engaging with the group in which they are studying. That is, the research learns about the group that they are studying by doing what the group is doing. Spradley notes that complete participation is distinct from active participation in that the researcher is already involved in the group that is being studied. The researcher in the role of complete participant is already familiar with the conventions of the group that is being studied and begins documenting their observations as they go through their normal interactions.

While I remained a complete observer in Earth Dance – limiting my interactions with the collective primarily to interviews, my role in the Songbird Collective alternated through the range of observer-participant and complete participant. Between November 2017 and March 2019, I spent about 5 hours each week with the collectives and 2 hours working on activities for which I volunteered such as helping open during events and gallery nights. Over the course of my research, I spent about 7 hours with the Earth Dance Collective and 200 hours with the Songbird Collective.

With Songbird in my early role of an observer-participant, I attended meetings, contributing to the discussion but mostly listened to the other members. I did this primarily early on in my involvement with the collective, before I felt confident in my ability to purposefully contribute to the group. Once I became more familiar with the collective and the members, I felt comfortable speaking up and volunteering, though occasionally I would go back to being more of an observer than participant. In the role of a complete participant, I made myself available to help wherever I was needed. Sometimes, this involved helping move sound equipment, helping with the front door during events, and cleanup before and after events. Some events allowed me to learn the more specialized tasks, such as operating the sound equipment. My involvement with the Songbird Collective for the purposes of this research ended in March 2018, while my involvement with the collective as a member has continued.

My process for data collection during my involvement with the Songbird Collective was to participate first, make field notes later. This was done for two reasons. The first reason was that I didn't want my note taking to detract from my participation

with the collective. Instead, I wanted to immerse myself as completely as I could into the role of a complete participant, something I felt would be hard to accomplish if I had to pull myself out of the moment to write down my thoughts. My immersion into the role of a complete participant allowed me to learn by doing. That is, I researched establishing and maintaining membership with a DIY art collective by going through the process myself, asking questions and engaging in informal conversations along the way.

The second reason was that taking field notes while I was participating felt uncomfortable, and I didn't want that to interfere with the activities that were going on. In "Researching DIY Cultures: Towards a Situated Ethical Practice for Activist-Academia," Julia Downes, Maddie Breeze and Naomi Griffin (2013:115) come to a similar conclusion, noting "[t]he performance of being a researcher visibly making field notes can contribute to a feeling of discomfort among participants aware of being researched." My process for field notes instead became one of taking short notes or snapshots in the moment whenever I had an opportunity and turning them into more complete notes once I was alone.

As noted above, my role in the Earth Dance Collective was that of a complete observer. In the meeting that I attended, I was able to listen without interrupting the flow of dialogue or being asked to provide my opinion. Members appeared to be comfortable enough to speak candidly about the day-to-day operations of the collective. In short, my presence in the meeting did not appear to create a noticeable disruption in the flow of the meetings themselves. My involvement with the Earth Dance collective for the purposes of this research was limited to the attending of meetings and the interviewing of the core

members and ended upon completion of my final interview. The limited scope of my involvement with the Earth Dance Collective was a result of time constraints – it was not feasible for me to maintain participant roles in more than one collective.

In-Depth Interviews

Between August and October 2018, I conducted interviews with one member of the Songbird Collective and the three core members of the Earth Dance Collective. Two of the interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes, while the other two interviews were approximately an hour. I asked interview participants to provide a pseudonym to protect their identity. I digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews. The first interviews provided useful information in determining how to word questions to be more conversational (Appendix A). The semi-structured nature of the interviews led to variations in the interviews (Berg and Lune 2011). I made changes to the guide to avoid restricting responses and to provide interview participants with the opportunity to provide information that they thought was important.

My first interview was with a member of the Earth Dance Collective that I arranged via email. In the email, I introduced myself as a graduate student researching DIY art collectives and asked if anyone in the collective would be interested in discussing their participation through an interview. Through a series of email exchanges, I provided the individual with the consent form (Appendix B) to review, the time and location of the interview were negotiated, and I was invited to attend the upcoming meeting. Through this initial contact with the collective, I was able to meet and secure interviews with other members. My process for ensuring that participants were truly informed was more

nanced than simply handing them the form and having them sign it. Not only did I give participants the consent form in advance so that they would have time to look it over, during our interview, I also reviewed the contents of the form and addressed questions. My research was approved by the Humboldt State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix B: IRB 17-206).

Data Analysis

I took field notes throughout my involvement with the Songbird Collective. I then conducted a preliminary analysis of these notes to develop the questions that would form the basis of my interview guide. Shortly after each interview was conducted, I transcribed the recordings to use during my content analysis. Once I conducted and transcribed the interviews with all core members of the Earth Dance Collective, I analyzed the transcripts alongside the field notes. I then conducted an additional interview with a member of the Songbird Collective using the same interview guide developed for my interviews with the Earth Dance Collective. After I transcribed this last interview, I organized both the transcripts and field notes into categorical themes.

Ethics & Epistemology

Research involving human subjects is required to observe ethical standards for the purpose of protecting the subjects participating in the research from undue physical or psychological harm (Berg and Lune 2011). The standards have developed over time and in response to clear violations of what constitutes ethical behavior in research. Currently, decisions as to what is considered ethical research are reviewed by institutional review

boards (IRBs) (Bhattacharjee 2012). These boards are required at all institutions that sponsor research involving human subjects, and have the ultimate say in what types of research are allowed.

The maintenance of ethical standards in human subject research should be considered throughout the entire process. Markham (2005) concludes that each choice in the development of a research project has ethical implications. By exercising control over the parameters of the study, the researcher decides how the participants will be represented. The researcher is not only in control of how the subjects are represented, but also the goal of the research. The question of representation should be addressed from the onset of the research to ensure that the research proceeds in an ethical manner.

As I became more involved in the Songbird Collective, it became necessary to evaluate and distinguish between my observations and my assumptions. In “Studying Something You Are Part Of: The View From the Bandstand,” Faulkner and Becker (2008) discuss the benefits and obstacles inherent in being a participant in the group that you are studying, particularly as it relates to art worlds. While researchers with prior experience and current participation in an art world have the benefit of understanding and identifying phenomena more readily than someone not familiar with the conventions and norms (the insider-outsider categories of researchers), prior experience may also inadvertently obscure the researchers frame of reference and keep them from asking questions to which they think they should already know the answers. Faulkner and Becker explain this by differentiating between what the researcher thinks and what the researcher knows. Faulkner and Becker (2008:16) note,

This distinction generates four types. I can correctly think I know something: I do know what I think I know. I can think I know and be wrong: I don't know what I think I know. And, conversely, I can think I don't know something I actually do know, or correctly think that I don't know something.

This distinction between thinking and knowing becomes more difficult to distinguish when we include the thinking/knowing of the individual(s) that the researcher is interacting with – what Faulkner and Becker (2008:16) call the “researcher-subject interaction.”

I started my research having some general knowledge of DIY as an artist that had been involved in DIY communities in the past. However, I made a conscious decision to not let this keep me from asking basic questions that I thought I already knew the answers to. This allowed me to compare the way that I understood things with the way that they were understood by others. As I began to develop my observations, I would weave them into my conversations to see how my thinking aligned with the thinking of the rest of the collective. In the following Chapter, I will discuss these observations as they relate to establishing and maintaining membership and the values that collective members share.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

My findings in this chapter focus on DIY art collective membership and the importance of values on the collective's artistic production. Both membership and roles in the collectives were fluid and open – establishing membership primarily consisted of showing up and helping out. As membership within the collective was maintained, members gained institutional knowledge – learning the various functions necessary to keep the collective going. Through a process of skill-sharing, these functions were taught by established members to newer members. Roles within the collective were voluntary, and members frequently cycled in and out of the collective, stepping up when they had the capacity to take on greater responsibilities and stepping back for various reasons to focus their attention elsewhere. Membership in a DIY art collective allowed members to pool their resources. This included sharing artistic materials, skills, and a place to perform. The DIY art collectives in this study were driven by their values. While not always explicitly stated, both art collectives strived for social and political change, valued all members of their community – both the members themselves and the larger community, and provided a space that nurtured freedom of expression.

Establishing and Maintaining Membership

Membership in both art collectives was fluid – individuals flowed in and out of the collectives. While some members stayed involved for one meeting, others stayed involved for years. Individuals also had intermittent participation with a collective, becoming heavily involved for a period, then going away for a while, and then coming

back. Throughout my participation with the Songbird Collective, more than 50 individuals cycled through. Though at most points in time, the membership in the collective was closer to 10 individuals, including five or six of whom were core members. This was also the pattern with the Earth Dance Collective. As Casey, founder of the Earth Dance Collective noted, “people come in and out, some people come in for, like, five or six years, some people for less time, you know, it’s pretty open.” For both art collectives, a core group of members served to keep the collectives functioning, while other individuals came in and out of the collectives more casually.

Through my discussions with members of the Earth Dance Collective, participants attributed their membership to the welcoming nature of the collective and its members, particularly Casey. As the founder and only remaining original member of the collective, Casey had the most influence on Earth Dance Collective’s organizational culture. A 40-something white performance artist with a contagious laugh, Casey described the goals of the Earth Dance Collective with phrases such as “shared ownership” and “shared authority.” Casey described herself in this way, “I think of myself as someone who really cares about creating spaces for multiple experiences, multiple perspectives.” Throughout our discussions, Casey was considerate and insightful, showing a deep compassion for the collective and her fellow members.

Other members of the Earth Dance Collective pointed to interactions with Casey as a primary reason for their initial involvement. As I sat outside a shopping center on a windy autumn afternoon with Jordan, a white 30 something performance artist, I listened as they thoughtfully described their first encounter with the Earth Dance Collective,

um, I heard about [Earth Dance] through a drag performer ... she saw me and she was like 'I found this place that would be right up your alley.' She literally dragged me to [Earth Dance], and after walking through the doors I saw [Casey], the space director, and I got involved because she just was completely open, welcoming, and when she heard I needed a space to perform she was like 'here you go, here's the space to perform.' So that's how I originally got involved, I was literally dragged into the space and then just never wanted to leave.

Similarly, Blair, an older actor turned acting teacher, described the influence Casey had on her decision to become a member of the collective,

[I] walked through [Earth Dance], it was when they just moved into the new space downtown, and, uh, we saw Casey and [my partner] tried to introduce me to her and I said 'no, I already know her' and, uh, then we just started talking and I started going to the meetings and going to the cabarets and volunteered and started helping out.

Both Jordan and Blair provided accounts of their initial involvement with the Earth Dance Collective that demonstrated the importance of belongingness – that membership in the collective was not just about having a place to present one's art. It was also about sharing space with other like-minded individuals who supported and encouraged one another's personal and creative development.

Membership in both art collectives was open – anyone was welcome to become a member. The openness of the collective's membership could be seen in part as a reason for its fluidity, as individuals could become involved without having to immediately commit. When I asked Jordan about the process for becoming a member of the Earth Dance Collective, they responded,

Anytime anyone is asking, like, 'how do I get involved?' we don't say 'oh, well, we're not sure you're a good fit,' we just tell them, like, 'here's our website, you can email us, our meetings are open,' like, we welcome anyone who wants to be welcomed.

The Songbird Collective expanded on this concept of membership by extending membership to all individuals and groups that had meetings or events in their space. In this way, all activities within the collective's space was the work of its members.

Members of both collectives came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Using Becker's art worlds framework, membership in both collectives covers the range of artist typologies, from artists operating in art worlds outside of the collective (i.e., integrated professionals) to individuals with little or no connection to art worlds outside of their involvement with the collective (i.e., folk artists). Formal training in the arts was not a requirement for membership in either of the collectives, though there were members in both collectives with arts degrees.

Showing up and helping out

Establishing and maintaining membership consisted of attending meetings and participating in events and the day-to-day functioning of the collective. In the interviews that I conducted with members of the Earth Dance Collective, this type of participation was referred to as "showing up" and "helping out." Describing this aspect of membership in the Collective, Blair noted, "I show up and I help out and I'm there."

Membership was initiated by showing up to meetings. For both art collectives, meetings provided an opportunity for members to get together and share their ideas. These ideas were then discussed by the members present, ultimately leading to decisions about planning and action. For the Songbird Collective, meeting discussions provided the primary method through which events were agreed on and scheduled. Members came to meetings with ideas for events that they wanted to hold in the space and pitched the ideas

to the rest of the collective. As ideas were discussed, plans took shape as other interested members provided input and asked questions about specific details. Once a date for an event was settled upon, it was added to the calendar. The member requesting the event took responsibility to ensure that the event had all the necessary resources to succeed.

This Songbird process described above was similar to the process described by members of the Earth Dance Collective. Earth Dance members got together for weekly meetings and to discuss ideas. The members that showed up participated in the discussions and helped make decisions. As Jordan explains,

It's kind of like a constant brainstorm. A lot of the decisions are made during our, um, weekly and bi-weekly meetings where collective members who want to have a voice come and have a voice. We go over, like, what needs to be done with the space, what event ideas we have, and then we also try to bring in, um, other voices that aren't heard as often, like, um, people who email the group with suggestions and ideas, we go over those during the meetings a lot. Um, and then it's kind of a majority rule, but no minority voice is left out. All opinions are taken in and given equal consideration.

Through these meetings, members that showed up had direct influence on the functioning of the collective. Members who were more active and were able to show up more frequently had greater opportunities for having their events make it onto the calendar. They provided a more descriptive account of their proposed events, fielded questions from other members, and recruited volunteers for the events.

While showing up was a basic requirement for establishing membership with a collective, maintaining membership also entailed helping out. Helping out consisted of taking on tasks basic to the upkeep of the space (e.g. cleaning, inventory), as well as engaging with the planning and implementation of events. The latter included not only

volunteering to help other members with their events, but also putting together events of one's own.

For the Songbird Collective, helping out, like showing up, began at the weekly meetings. At meetings, various tasks were brought up for discussion, the day and time for their completion was determined, and members present volunteered to help out. For instance, at one of the meetings I attended, the need to clean the space was discussed. Jamie mentioned that they would be coming in on Saturday to do some basic cleanup for an upcoming event and asked if anyone else would be available to help out. One member mentioned that they had a shop vac that they could bring. Other members offered to help out too. Someone else suggested sending out an email to invite to all of the members. The process for enlisting member participation for cleaning was really very similar as the process for planning events. At the weekly meetings, the upcoming events were discussed, and members volunteered to open up, close, work the sound equipment, and assist with other jobs. If there were not enough volunteers to help out with an event, the event organizer sent an email to recruit members who were not at the meeting.

Division of Labor

The division of labor of both art collectives reflected the fluidity and openness of their memberships. That is, the tasks necessary for the maintenance of the collective space and the scheduling and coordination of events were rotated across the membership. In traditional art worlds, the division of labor is seen “as ‘natural’ and inherent in the equipment and the medium” (Becker 1982:13). In the art collectives that I studied, members switched between roles and tasks with some limitations. Within both

collectives, members generally fell into one of two categories: the jack of all trades and the specialist.

The jack of all trades and the specialist

Rather than having an explicit delineation of roles and tasks, members often learned some or all the necessary assignments in the collective. As a member of the Earth Dance collective noted, “I kind of fill the same role that everyone does, which is a jack of all trades.” With a relative fluidity of membership in both collectives, it was important to have core groups of individuals who were able to keep the collectives functioning. Over time, the members who maintained consistent membership with a collective ended up becoming more of a jack of all trades.

The jack of all trades approach necessitated and facilitated member skill sharing; new members worked with continuing members to learn a range of collective tasks. Skill sharing helped to ensure that someone was always able to fill the necessary roles for each event. This cross-training was particularly important for tasks that required more complex skill sets. Often, new members started by learning to complete basic tasks as a way to get involved. As involvement in the collective continued over time, members learned more about group functions and were asked to help out in more varied ways. They learned usually by volunteering for new tasks and asking questions along the way. In the following section, I will further develop the utilization of skill-sharing within the collectives.

Unlike the jack of all trades, the specialist was a member who had a knowledge of or interest in a particular role and made it their main contribution to the group. Generally,

specialist roles required considerable training that members acquired through previous experiences or through learning it from another member via skill-sharing. In the Songbird Collective, specialists filled the main roles of the gallery coordinator and the sound technician.

The gallery coordinator was responsible for keeping the collective's art gallery running. They developed the schedule of artists that rotated through the gallery each month. They prepared the space for each new show, ensuring last's month show was properly taken down, and getting the gallery walls repaired and painted for the next show. In my time working with the Songbird Collective, there were two gallery coordinators, Travis and Lindsay, both of whom had prior experience running art galleries.

I had the opportunity to work with Travis, an energetic 20-something, in developing a collaborative art installation in December 2018. The installation was going to be a showcase of collective member's art, and I was invited to contribute both in helping set up the installation and as an artist featured in the installation. Travis helped me and the other artists develop a theme for the show – an exploration of the creative and social development of artists as members of a collaborative community. Throughout the process, Travis was encouraging to myself and the other artists, showing that the role of the gallery coordinator is not only to make sure art is on the walls, but also to work with artists to realize their creative visions.

When Travis stepped back and Lindsay, a white 20-something with an arts degree, took over the role of gallery coordinator, the collaborative element continued. Lindsay would often seek to involve other members in the process of taking down and

setting up art installations. Additionally, Lindsay sought out the creative input of other members of the collective, asking if anyone knew of artists that they would like to see featured in the gallery. So, while only one person had the role of gallery coordinator, the role was not siloed off from the rest of the collective. When the Songbird Collective decided to form committees (discussed further below) the process of running the art gallery was opened even further to other members.

A sound technician sets up and runs the audio equipment during live events. They make sure that all the equipment is connected and properly working and adjust the sound levels throughout the event to ensure that there is no unwanted noise or feedback. In my time working with the Songbird Collective, there were two main sound technicians. Jamie, a soft-spoken 20-something who had learned the process through trial and error, and Chris, a 20-something who had prior experience as a sound technician. Other members of the collective filled in when one of the two main sound technicians were unable to volunteer for an event.

When I started participating with the Songbird Collective, Jamie was the main sound technician, working the sound both in the events they organized as well as other member's events, though there were other members who were also knowledgeable of the setup and could fill in whenever Jamie was unavailable. The sound set up was straightforward – there were a set of PA speakers, the speakers were connected to an amplifier, and the audio inputs were run through a mixing board. When Jamie stepped back, Chris took over as sound technician. Chris brought a more in-depth understanding

of the theory and technical applications of sound engineering. Over time, he built a more complicated sound system by adding compressors, special effects, and other components.

While the additions provide a skilled sound technician with more ways to improve the sound of an event, they also further specialized the role of the sound technician, making it more challenging for other members to be (re)trained on the new system. Over time, most members who understood how to work the previous sound system learned how to operate the new setup, though Chris was the only one with an in-depth understanding of its features. That is, while other members were able to make the system work (i.e., get sound to come out of the speakers), Chris was the only member who knew how to fine-tune the sound and troubleshoot issues.

During an event that I volunteered at that was organized by a member with some understanding of the sound system, we were unable to get the system to work for sound-check. After working for approximately half an hour, trying various methods to get the system to work and calling other members to see if they knew what was going on with it, we discovered a cable had come disconnected, causing the speakers to not get any signal. To help prevent future issues from arising, Chris put together a basic guide for running the sound system (e.g., make sure this button is on, this knob is turned to the right, etc.) so that it would be easier for other people to troubleshoot issues.

Skill-sharing

The division of labor in both art collectives was facilitated through skill sharing – a way of passing on the conventions of the collective to new members. Through this process, new members worked with continuing members to learn about the collective's

functions and gain the skills to complete the associated tasks. In the Earth Dance Collective, new members were encouraged to reach out when they had questions. As Jordan noted,

We have pretty much an open-door policy for new members, where they can always, um, like, contact anyone in the collective if they have questions, if they need help. There's always an open ear, either through our space director or through one of us other senior members of the collective. And we encourage that of new members. We encourage them to, like, jump into projects, if there's something they want to do, to voice it.

The process Jordan described of learning by doing and asking questions along the way was consistent with my experiences working with the Songbird Collective.

The skill sharing process often happened at the time a member volunteered for a task that was new to them; they learned the skills needed as they completed the task. This was the primary way that I learned and taught others. When I first started showing up and helping out with the Songbird Collective, I volunteered for the opening shift at events. Opening shift involved pre-event tasks including cleaning, washing dishes, and putting the open sign out on the sidewalk. I also worked the door on admissions and greeted people as they arrived.

During my first few times volunteering on opening, I worked primarily with Jamie. I would ask questions such as “where does this go?” or “where do I find this?” when I didn't know how a particular task was expected to be completed. Through this process, Jamie imparted the basic knowledge needed for me to feel comfortable filling that role on my own. Eventually, I became a person that could provide new members with the answers to questions that I once had and, in the process, trained them on to fill that particular role.

As I became more comfortable and familiar with the collective, I began learning about other roles and tasks through the same process. I asked questions to a member more knowledgeable and tried to follow the steps that they provided. At one meeting, Jamie asked if anyone was interested in meeting on Saturday to learn the process of working the sound system. A few other members and I indicated that we were interested. Another member mentioned that it would be good to send an invitation for members who were unable to make it to the meeting. When I arrived for the training, Jamie was already there cleaning the space up, something they did every Saturday (during that period of time, Jamie seemed to spend a majority of their free time volunteering at the space). When the other member arrived for the training, we gathered around the mixing board. I was excited to learn the process, as I had been wanting to volunteer to work the sound on upcoming events.

Jamie took out their iPhone, clicked the Spotify Application, and played Le Tigre – a late-90s feminist dance-punk band from New York City. Then they connected their phone to the mixing board. Jamie went through each step of the process, explaining the components of the sound system (e.g. the mixing board, the amplifier, the speakers), the basic steps of working the sound system (e.g. make sure everything is turned on, check to see if the cables are connected, turn the volume up on the channels), and common issues that occur during the process and the steps to correct them (e.g. if sound is not coming out of the speakers, check the connections, lower the volume if it starts to distort). Then we each had a chance to go through the process ourselves. When it was my turn, I stood

in front of the mixing board, adjusted the volume, messed with the pan and equalizer, asked questions and listened to Jamie's feedback.

Forming committees

During my involvement with the Songbird Collective, other members had tried to form committees. The committees would be in charge of separate aspects of the collective's functioning and members interested in helping out with a particular project could join a committee. In my discussions with former and long-standing members, I learned that similar efforts had been attempted in the past, in one form or another, throughout the collective's existence. These attempts had been, to varying degrees, unsuccessful for a variety of reasons. Members said that there was a lack of follow-through from members, role instability due to membership fluidity, as well as members stepping back from roles due to over-commitment.

During my field research, members of the Songbird Collective tried to form committees focused on key collective functions: financial planning, event organization, and gallery space coordination. One of the members created a Google Doc into which everyone was supposed to contribute details of the work of each committee. Once the Google Doc was created, it was shared with the collective. Members were supposed to add their names and service interests to the committee Docs. Each committee had one or more people serving in leadership capacities. All members could participate in all or none of the committee's operations. While this method of forming committees increased the likelihood of task specialization among members, most members were involved in multiple committees, thereby maintaining a decentralized distribution of tasks.

Committees met to discuss their plans. When there was a decision that would be best made by the collective, committees reported their discussions to the collective during the weekly meetings. For example, at one meeting, a member of the ‘beautification committee’ – a committee that worked on space aesthetics – had an idea to rearrange the room where events were held. Over the course of the discussion, several other members expressed interest in the project, brainstorming additional ideas and resources that could be utilized. The member that started the conversation stated that they would set up a time to meet up for anyone interested in helping out.

Stepping up and stepping back

Members balanced their time participating in the collective with other responsibilities, such as work or school. Casey explained,

Everyone still has all of ... you know, they have to pay rent. They have to, you know, work a job. They have to do all these things to manage the capitalist structure. And, like, survival. And so, there’s only sometimes, I think, so much space for collectivity when people are still confronted by difficult realities that they have to address. Those kinds of, like, time, space, money sorts of things create real challenges to ... people’s ability to commit over long-term periods.

This approach to volunteering relates to the membership fluidity, as casual members were more inclined to come and go than core members. Stepping up meant taking on greater responsibilities within the group and was a way for individuals to become part of the core membership. Likewise, stepping back meant relinquishing those responsibilities to other members of the group. Casual members generally did not take on these responsibilities, making it easier for them to disconnect and reconnect with the collective whenever they wanted. As Casey explained,

You know, for sure, there's different times in which people's capacity is more or less, and I think that's something as a group we could work on ... like, sometimes, we have meetings and it's just like two or three of us.

When core members felt that they were taking on more responsibilities than they could handle, they decided whether to keep going or step back and let someone else take over.

Lindsay explained,

I typically take on more work than I should and then resent the organization afterwards, or, like, just I do too much and then I pull back a lot, um, because I, like, perceive slack in people's enthusiasm for things or in their follow through and so usually I'll, like, take it up for them until it doesn't feel like a group thing anymore and it just feels like it's me.

It was common in these instances for the collective member to step back and let others within the group take over their responsibilities. The duration in which members step back was variable, and sometimes permanent. In my experience with the Songbird Collective, members stated their intentions to step back, sometimes through email but most often in person during a weekly meeting. When members stated their intentions to step back, it provided other members in the collective an opportunity and incentive to step up and take on more responsibilities.

Issues arose when a member stepped back without informing the rest of the collective. For example, when a newer member of the Songbird Collective stopped attending meetings or responding to emails, they left several events in an unfinished state. Once it became apparent that the member was not coming back, it then fell onto the remaining members of the collective to decide whether or not to pick up where the member left off and complete the events, or to cancel them altogether. After a final effort to find someone to take on the events, Travis, a white 30 something who was also new to

the collective, stepped up to take on the events. The decision to cancel an event can be difficult, particularly when outside artists are involved, as it can potentially keep them from wanting to participate in future events.

Resources

Using Becker's art worlds framework, the resources of the art collectives can be broadly grouped into two categories: material and human. The greatest material resources that the collectives in my study had were the building in which they hosted their events (the Songbird Collective was able to rent out the space after a crowdfunding campaign). Having a physical space allowed the members to contribute the remaining essential material resources (e.g. staging, audio/visual equipment). The space and the other material resources were shared among all members. The sharing of resources allowed members to complete projects that would otherwise be cost prohibitive. While the sharing of resources can create issues if a member steps back and decides to take their resources with them, during my involvement with the Songbird Collective, this issue never arose.

Members of the both collectives used their space to showcase their artworks. For members who were musicians or performance artists, the collective provided them with a venue and equipment to perform in front of audiences on their own terms, rather than having to get booked at an outside venue. For visual artists, the collective provided gallery space to exhibit and sell their works. The openness of the collective's membership – anyone can join and use the space to show their art – eliminated the barriers found in other venues and galleries that restrict the artists and the type of art that is presented. Similarly, the Earth Dance Collective provides a space for its members – primarily

performance artists – to practice and perform their works. I discuss the importance of DIY collectives as an open and inviting space for artists to show their work in the section on freedom of expression.

For the Songbird Collective, sharing space and resources was negotiated with the help of a shared calendar. Members presented their ideas for events to the rest of the collective and decided on a day and time that they would like to use the space. If the time that the member requested was open (usually on a first-come first-served basis) then the collective placed the event on the calendar. Likewise, if the requested time was already taken by another event, the requesting member looked on the calendar to find another available time or, in some cases, combined their event with the event that was already happening. With the openness of the collective, anyone could request use of the space. The main guidelines that the Songbird Collective followed for the use of their space was that members followed through with their scheduled events (discussed in the section on stepping up and stepping back), and that proposed events respect the values of the collective (discussed in the section on values).

Members who took on larger tasks, such as event coordination, worked with interested members to complete make sure all the necessary tasks had volunteers and were completed. One or multiple members assumed a lead role and solicited help as necessary from the rest of the collective. A member of the Earth Dance Collective explained:

(the leads) get the liquor license, they line up the acts, they get somebody to run the sound, they set up the bar, get somebody to run the bar, get somebody to volunteer ... they do any publicity for it, make the Facebook event, try to get in

the [local newspaper] or whatever we're going to do to get any publicity out ... and then they either run the show or they have an emcee.

In this way, members supported the completion of one another's art projects. As a member of the Earth Dance Collective notes, "the larger our collective gets, the easier it is on everyone in the space to maintain it and to keep it thriving ... there's no way for it to be a one person show." Helping out is a reciprocal process – making oneself available to help out with an event makes other members more willing to help out in return.

Establishing and Maintaining Values

Becker (1974:774) notes, "every cooperative network that constitutes an art world creates value by the agreement of its members as to what is valuable." This valuation process distinguishes the art world of DIY collectives from the contemporary art world as described by Becker. In the contemporary art world, the final determination of value is largely financial: the sales price or revenue generated by a work of art. This consideration was largely absent from the DIY art collectives in this study, as both collectives were structured as non-profit organizations. Additionally, while some members of the Songbird Collective sold their art in the gift-shop area, none of them were making a living off of their works, and some even put what they earned selling their works back in to the collective. Rather, for the DIY art collectives in this study, the final determination of value was largely the collective's ability to uphold their shared values. Broadly, these values can be grouped into three main categories – social and political change, community, and freedom of expression. Each of these values are interconnected and influence one another.

Progressive social and political change

Central to the values of both collectives was the desire for progressive, left-leaning, social and political change. This orientation was both explicitly and implicitly stated and understood by all members. For the Songbird Collective, these values were explicitly stated. When you walked into the Songbird Collective's space, their values were prominently displayed on a handwritten poster board in bright colors, outlining the causes that the collective supports (e.g. antiracism, antifascism, LGBTQIA rights) and the goal of the collective to create a space where all members of the community could come together and express themselves as equals.

For the Earth Dance Collective, these values were more implied than directly stated. The simple phrase, "all are welcome," served as the guide by which the collective operated. Still, members seemed to understand the opportunities for social and political change that the collective provided. As Blair noted, "there's also a very underlying social narrative, that there's some social change that we can do." While, from my interviews with the members of the Earth Dance Collective, this narrative did not seem to be explicitly stated, it was present in the types of events the collective organized, as well as the organizations that the collective partnered with (e.g., immigration rights activists, harm reduction advocates).

Both art collectives provided the community with a space to organize around social and political issues. Casey noted that, in addition to their schedule of performance art and other events, the Earth Dance Collective also held workshops focused on social and political issues including racism, sexism, and immigration rights. The issues that the

collectives organized around reflected the diversity of their members and the communities that they lived in. For example, people of color (POC) members of the Songbird Collective organized workshops to discuss issues surrounding race and privilege, as well as writing groups where members of the community learned to share their stories with one another. Noting the overrepresentation of white male artists in most galleries and performance spaces, members of the collective actively worked to find and promote women, indigenous people, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA community.

Members often bridged their work with the collectives and their activism outside of the collectives. As Casey explained to me,

I do a lot of other, like, volunteer work in the community, that actively seeks to reach out to people who are marginalized and so I think, you know, I identify on some level as someone who is interested in what isn't mainstream ... And I identify with that, and I identify with, like that sort of, like misfit, you know, who's out there ... that has been neglected or has been kind of cast away or has not been invited into the center in some way.

Similarly, members of the Songbird Collective frequently organized events that connected with their participation in outside activist organizations. For example, one member involved with a women's rights advocacy group organized workshops and events promoting awareness and addressing issues affecting women.

Feeling and marking inclusive creative community

Both art collectives valued community building – both within the collective and the surrounding community. Collective members noted becoming involved because of the welcoming nature of the collective and its members. Through participation in an art

collective, members noted finding a sense of belongingness and a space to develop and explore their creativity. Jordan explained,

I would definitely describe [Earth Dance] as the family you never knew you wanted to be a part of ... the [Earth Dance Collective] will embrace all of your quirks, all of your oddities, and they will show you that all of those things that you thought made you different actually make you exemplary and make you an even more artistic person than you thought you were.

This aligns with Casey's explanation for forming the collective – to create a space that can recognize and cultivate the creative potential in everyone. Casey explained “I [was] actively seeking in many ways to diversify access to power.”

For Blair, becoming involved with an art collective provided an opportunity to stay involved with the arts community. Blair explained,

I had really stepped away from performing, myself, for a long period of time while I raised kids and was a teacher, and I, kind of, like, my creativity was very stifled, and I didn't ... I wasn't feeling so much like I could, you know, like I had ... I grew up in the theatre, I sang, I danced, I did all kinds of things, but I hadn't done any of those, and I wrote, you know, and performed, but I hadn't done any of those things for a really long time and my creative brain was, kind of, um, diminished.

The openness of the Earth Dance Collective provided opportunities for people longing to (re)discover their creative ambitions.

Collective members noted encouraging others to speak up when they had ideas and to take on roles that they may otherwise have been afraid of trying. Lindsay explained,

when I sense people are uncomfortable with taking a leadership role or expressing their creative ideas because of bullshit, like, they don't think that's something they can do, or that's going to be accepted or understood, that's when I start to push people more.

Members of the Songbird Collective encouraged one another at the meetings to get involved and take on projects that they were interested in but may not have felt confident in their abilities to complete. As members of the Songbird Collective often explained, the collective provided a space and the resources necessary for all members to “do-it-yourself” and, as a community, for all members to “do-it-together.”

Freedom of Expression (With Limits)

Both art collectives valued the opportunity for all members to engage in freedom of expression. At the same time, however, there was an understanding among members of both art collectives that balancing inclusive community with freedom of expression meant curtailing forms of expression that were hurtful to members of the community. The goal of the collectives was to provide a space for all members to express their ideas equally. As Jordan explained,

freedom of expression, the freedom to be who you are, I would say is the biggest ideal that the group, as a collective, has, and the freedom to create ... that is one thing that I would say every member has in common, is that they want to create a space where art can thrive, and where art can be art, and expression can be expressed in a safe and open way.

As an introverted artist, Jordan told me how the Earth Dance collective provided a space to build their confidence and express their identity. Jordan explained, “I felt [my identity] was being suppressed by those around me who were well-intending, but their methodology, um, prevented me from being who I wanted to be” – this was something that membership in the Earth Dance Collective provided.

The emphasis on freedom of expression as a core value of both art collectives could be seen in the variety of art and events they showcased. Blair explained,

everything happens at [Earth Dance] from gong playing to dance parties to drag shows ... every month we do a cabaret that is very inclusive, from very professional aerialists to people that are just starting, somebody that's reading a poem, someone doing a drag routine or a comedia bit or scene or telling a story, or a band or a duet, or all kinds of things happen there, and then there's all kinds of different themes of things that happen.

Similarly, the Songbird Collective organized and hosted a variety of events, including monthly artist spotlights in their gallery space, workshops focused on a variety of topics ranging from art techniques to social issues, and live events including spoken word poetry, open mic nights, and musicians from a wide array of genres.

The value placed upon freedom of expression superseded (to an extent) the marketability of the form of expression. As Jordan explained,

it's the one, like, strict policy that [Earth Dance Collective] has, that no one is turned away for lack of funds ... no one is turned away for being different, no one is turned away for having a mindset that is different than others.

Similarly, the members of the Songbird Collective generally did not dismiss an idea for an event because of the perception that it would have low attendance. Furthermore, attendance in general is not always the deciding factor in determining an event's success. During a discussion in one of the weekly meetings about an event that had lower than expected turnout, members who were there were still content that both the artists and those that did show up enjoyed themselves. Both art collectives regularly organized and hosted events that were either free or on a donation basis, as well as provided outside individuals and activist group's use of the space for free or a reduced cost.

Freedom of expression for some collective members meant pushing boundaries. Lindsay noted, "I wonder, like, how I can facilitate weird art stuff in places where maybe that's not, like, socially normal." For example, during her time as gallery coordinator,

Travis organized an exhibition of “subversive art” consisting of artists whose work had been censored from display at other galleries for being considered obscene. For this exhibition, the gallery was expanded to include pedestals for freestanding art (usually, the gallery only accommodated hanging art) and the promotion of the exhibition highlighted the works “subversive” nature.

For both art collectives, freedom of expression had its limits – it was coupled with a shared value that harmful expression was not welcome within the collective’s space.

Jordan explained,

we trust our members, but if someone does, like, start advocating for hatred or violence with [Earth Dance] we do pull them aside and we do tell them, ‘hey, that’s not ok, [Earth Dance] is a space for peace and acceptance, it is not a space for hate speech, it is not a space for promoting bigotry or blind ideals of hatred.

Collective members tried to hold one another accountable for their words and actions in real time – to intercede the moment harmful expression occurs – so that the individual perpetrating the harm could understand that their words or actions are causing harm and to give them an opportunity to resolve the issues their harmful expression has created.

During my observations with the Songbird Collective, I did not experience this first hand, the collective seemed to convey their values to artists beforehand so that any potential issues were resolved before the events happened.

From my interviews with the members of the Earth Dance Collective, I discovered there wasn’t a written accountability process. Rather, members spoke up when they felt someone was pushing the boundaries of freedom of expression into harmful territory. In my interview with Casey, I asked if she could remember any examples of times when she felt compelled to talk to another member about their form of

expression. Hesitantly, Casey described an occasion when she felt the need to speak up to another member about their performance:

We definitely had a performance once where there was, what I felt like was appropriation of like Native, like First Nations traditions, you know. I mean, and I don't think the people doing it were aware. I mean, in fact, I know they weren't ... unless they ... I mean, I don't think they would lie to me, you know. I mean I don't think they were aware, you know I think they ... for them ... it was ... you know, like a sincere expression. But, you know, it's that ok, like, you know, life sometimes provides an opportunity to become aware of like, 'oh, like oh, this performance is actually you know in some way like ... yeah, like appropriating like other people's spiritual traditions' ... you know, and so ... um ... I don't know. For me, like if I see something like that, I think because I do feel so connected to the space and what happens here, you know, that I feel like kind of compelled to say something.

For Casey, a member of the collective had (unknowingly) given a performance that went beyond what was acceptable as freedom of expression within the collective, and she felt the need to speak up and let the member know the issues with their performance.

Balancing freedom of expression with accountability is difficult, as accountability can also be perceived as censorship. As Casey described it,

I mean, there's still things I wrestle with, like 'oh, should I say something?' ... there's a fine line around righteousness too ... and like, creating a space where righteousness or judgement becomes like a limiting factor to actual change or conversation.

The limits that the Earth Dance Collective and Songbird Collective placed on the freedom of expression were focused on ensuring that their spaces were welcoming to everyone in the community, rather than censoring the creative expression of their members. During my observations with the Songbird Collective, a wide variety of individuals flowed in and out of the collective, and conscious effort was given to the equal representation of multiple identities (e.g., indigenous people, POC, LGBTQIA)

within the collective. The Songbird Collective curtailed harmful expression through their written rules – specifically stating that harmful (e.g., racist, homophobic, ageist, ableist) forms of expression would not be tolerated at the space. Artists wanting to participate in events being held by the Songbird Collective were given this information beforehand. Furthermore, collective members used these rules as guidelines when selecting outside artists to contribute to an event – artists were given the collective’s rules beforehand to read over and agree to uphold during their performance.

Conclusion

Membership in the DIY art collectives I studied was open and fluid. The basic components of membership were showing up and helping out. Showing up consisted of attending meetings and events, participating in discussions, and sharing ideas. Helping out consisted of organizing events, volunteering to assist with other member’s events, and contributing to the overall upkeep of the collective’s space. Member roles were not clearly delineated, though overtime most members learned how to fill most of the roles necessary to the collective’s functioning. Members did not require prior knowledge of the conventions of the DIY art world. Rather, through a process of skill-sharing, members were able to learn these conventions and then share them with new members. During my observations with the Songbird Collective, roles were defined more clearly through the establishing of committees. Members volunteered to take on specific responsibilities that aligned with their interests.

Membership with the DIY art collectives had to be managed with other responsibilities. As members had more time and energy available to commit to the

collective, they would step up and assume more responsibilities. Likewise, members stepped back from the collective when they did not have the time and energy available to commit to the collective. This process of members stepping up and stepping back contributed to the fluidity of the collective's membership. However, at all times, a core group of members worked to keep the collective together, taking on responsibilities when other members were unable to keep things going.

Like other art worlds, the DIY collectives have two main groups of resources – material and human. As performance-oriented collectives, the greatest material resource of the DIY collectives were their buildings. Having a physical space provided members with their own venues and galleries to showcase their works. Sharing a space also allowed members to pool other material resources together, thereby allowing members to work on projects that would otherwise be cost prohibitive. Members of the DIY art collective also shared their time and energy with one another, volunteering to assist with one another's events.

The DIY art collectives in this study differed from Becker's analysis of contemporary art worlds in their valuation process. That is, while Becker focuses on the flow of monetary resources as the primary driver of the contemporary art world, non-monetary values were of greater importance to the DIY art collectives. Both the Songbird Collective and the Earth Dance Collective valued progressive social and political change, as observed by the types of events that the collectives and the organizations that the collectives partnered with.

Both DIY art collectives in this study valued community building. The collectives were welcoming of all members of the community (e.g., race, sex, gender, socioeconomic status) and worked to build a space representative of their community's diversity. Furthermore, the collectives valued community building within their organizations – helping one another grow and develop as artists. The emphasis on community building was consistent with the emerging trend of DIY groups to label themselves as Do-It-Together (DIT).

Freedom of expression was a core value of the DIY art collectives. Members noted that membership in a DIY art collective provided them with opportunities to express themselves in a welcoming environment. With the opportunity to express one's creative ideas came an understanding amongst members that some forms of expressions would not be tolerated at the collective. Members tried to balance freedom of expression with accountability, noting that it can often be perceived as censorship.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Two Art Worlds Compared

I began my research with the intention to document the process of establishing and maintaining membership in a DIY art collective through Becker's art world framework. The concepts Becker developed (e.g., cooperative links, conventions, resources) provided a guide for understanding the elements necessary for the production of art. However, the way that these elements appeared in the DIY art collectives was quite different from Becker's analysis of the contemporary art worlds.

The fluidity of the membership in the DIY art collectives contrasted with the relative stability of Becker's art worlds. As a researcher, this proved challenging, as the flow of members in and out of the collectives made it difficult to make connections outside of the core group of members. For instance, I would attend a meeting at the Songbird Collective one week and there would be five new people, and the following week there would just be the core members. However, the constant influx of people was refreshing, as new ideas were always being presented, new projects being developed, and new events being organized.

The economic component of Becker's art worlds framework was largely absent as a motivating factor for maintaining membership in the DIY art collectives in my research, as members of both collectives supported their art through other means. In the place of financial motivation, the DIY art collectives provided members with a community of open, like-minded people and a space to develop as an artist. These two resources proved

to be the main components to the production of art for the members in lieu of monetary gain.

Largely absent from Becker's analysis of art worlds is discussion of art as a mechanism for social and political change. Through my review of the literature on social movements and art activism, as well as my experience with the DIY art collectives in this study, it is clear that the production of art can be closely connected with activist ideals. Furthermore, the production of art for the purpose of social and political change opens up the possibility of theorizing art worlds radically different from those in Becker's analysis. That is, the introduction of DIY art collectives and the broader fields of art activism allow for an expansion of the cooperative links explored in the art world framework to include the efforts of communities and social movements in the production of art.

Opportunities for Future Research

The DIY art collectives in this study represent only a portion of the network of the area's larger art world. While it was outside of the scope of my research, I became aware of the interconnectedness of the area's art world through my interactions with the collective members. Frequently, through the interviews or informal conversations, someone would describe their participation in other artist groups, activist organizations, venues, galleries, and DIY collectives. Further research mapping the networks of connections of DIY artists could provide insight into the larger art world – the flow of resources and the broader system of cooperative links – that is missed when looking at only one or two groups.

DIY venues and art collectives are more susceptible to economic strains than are organizations operating in more established art worlds. During my research, I became aware of DIY art collectives that were no longer in operation, and artists who were once a part of the DIY community that were no longer associated with the scene. Further research into the reasons DIY art collectives disband could provide ongoing collectives with insight into the potential challenges of operating in their art world.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

DIY Community Activism & Creative Expression

Getting Involved

1. How did you hear about/get involved with the collective? (significant people, books, events)
2. And how long have you been participating with the group?
3. What role do you feel like you play in the group?
4. How do you think others see you? What makes you think that?

Identity linked to Group

1. How does your involvement in the collective relate to your overall identity or identities?
2. How do you feel that your role benefits the group as a whole?
3. How well do you feel everyone in the group works together as a team?

Norms and Values Maintenance

1. What would you say are the ideals and values of the group?
2. How are these expressed. Can you give me an example?
3. How do you share and maintain those with new and continuing members?
4. How do you know when someone breaches those values? What does that look like? How is that managed?

5. Have you ever had to deal with someone who was breaching the groups values?

Can you give me an example?

Challenges

1. What have been some of your challenges?

Events and Structure

1. Could you describe the group's decision making process?
2. Could you describe the process of putting an event together?
3. How well do you think that this strategy works?
4. How would you describe the group that you are a part of to someone who may be interested in becoming a member?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form
INFORMED CONSENT
DIY Community Activism & Creative Expression

You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve an in-person interview. My name is Preston Allen, and I am a graduate student at Humboldt State University Department of Sociology. The purpose of this research is to learn about the collaborative process of members of a DIY art collective.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer questions relevant to your experiences participating in a DIY art collective. Your participation in this study will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes and direct quotes may be used from the interview in my research.

While discussion of challenges working with the community may be stressful to discuss, any level of discomfort is no higher than that of day-to-day life. Participants may find benefits from reflecting on their experiences with their collective

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right not to participate. You may discontinue the interview without penalty. You may also skip questions that you prefer not to discuss.

Any Identifying information will remain confidential. You will have an opportunity to choose a pseudonym. If you cannot think of one, I can assign one using a random name generator.

The paper consent form will be scanned and then destroyed within one week of our interview. The audio files of our interview will be destroyed after transcription. Your interview data and the scan of your consent form will be maintained on a password protected hard drive. All electronic information will be destroyed within three years after the study is completed.

If you have any questions about this research, please email me at: psa76@humboldt.edu. If you have any concerns with this study, the questions, or your rights as a participant, you may email my thesis supervisor at Mary.Virnoche@humboldt.edu or the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at irb@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5165.

Your signature below indicates that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, and that you understand that your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time.

Signature

Date