

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance

Curating Encounter in the Public Square
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April 2016

Thesis Submitted for Masters of Arts

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Master of Arts, Performance Curation
Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance
Wesleyan University, April 2016

By studying a program of artist-driven think tanks at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts exploring issues of the urban future, labor, ecology and freedom, I will examine the challenges and affective capacities of a call-and-response pedagogy for action research located at a civic institution. This research, in the expanded field of socially engaged art, mines the roles of the art center as public square, the artist as public intellectual and the community as a generative culture making entity. By observing research oriented working groups engaged in collaborative knowledge production for creative public intervention and exhibition, this work explores the conditions for increased equity and operations of a civic public practice, which employs participants in a relationship of partnership with the institution.

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INTRODUCTION

The greatest treasures of culture are not sculptures or specimens, but rather human relationships. Magnificent and precious, ourselves, close pairs, families, and groups belong in the worlds museums create, although living culture has quite different needs than rocks or bones. The next age is demanding change of global proportions and a nearly infinite capacity for human caring. Let us meet these needs with courage and creativity, one relationship at a time through the social work of museums. –Lois Silverman (Silverman 2009, 155)

Part of my arts manifestation is process. We can reveal the arts process as the object of a performance, or the object to be viewed. It's a performance of culture; it's a performance of process... It's also aesthetically beautiful. –Marc Bamuthi Joseph (Schultz and Peters 2012, 227)

By studying a program of artist-driven think tanks at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts exploring issues of urban futures, labor, ecology and freedom, I will examine the challenges and affective capacities of a call-and-response pedagogy for action research located at a civic institution. This research, in the expanded field of socially engaged art, mines the roles of the art center as public square, the artist as public intellectual, and the community as a generative culture making entity. By observing research oriented working groups engaged in collaborative knowledge production for creative public intervention and exhibition, this work explores the conditions for increased equity and operations of a civic public practice, which employs participants in a relationship of partnership with the institution.

By theoretically examining the case study of YBCA's think tanks in relation to public life, sociology, community arts pedagogy and performance strategies, I will illuminate a specific methodology for engaging publics in partnership with a civic

and cultural institution, focusing on a call and response approach, in which all actors – the involved artists, community participants and staff facilitators from the institution – transmit, transform and generate material to form a live research process and public exhibition. This analysis is uniquely positioned amongst other work addressing projects at the nexus of community arts practice and socially engaged art, by articulating how each domain redefines the other, and by considering the site of the art center through the functions of a public square. How do the site of the art center and presence of artists distinctly affect the nature and output of inquiry-based research? How do practitioners use the art part of the center to choreograph public dialogue differently? The call and response process described in this paper entails alternate ways of creating dialogue thus forming a variety of deliberative modes, which go beyond words. What is the impact of a multi-sensual practice, which employs a variety of dialogic formats to include not only the verbal and linguistic, but also the somatic social, the commensual, the embodied and reflective listening as part of a nuanced facilitation of call and response? After providing some context, I will argue the importance of these micro-moments as particulars, which drive the relationship development of a cohort, shape the civic identity of a site as one which facilitates collective becoming, and seed culture shifts via little utopias and the formation of new meta-narratives. The work contributes to a larger conversation about the civic role of an art center and public dialogue in the 21st century, adaptive to a rapid and dramatically changing urban environment, experiencing shifting demographics, politics, socio-economics, technology and culture.

Methodologically, I take a performance ethnographic approach, generating analysis from my position as both researcher and program manager of the Creative Ecosystem (a program of which the think tanks are a part) at YBCA. The analysis is guided by my research into commons theory and the public square, dialogic and socially cooperative art practice, genealogy of call and response and contemporary applications of that communication pattern, design thinking and select performance scholarship related to live assembly from the 1990s to the present. Data collection for the case study occurs through interviews with artist, community and facilitator participants and exhibition visitors, a coded qualitative survey, as well as my own work as witness/participant in the selected events. Throughout, I prioritize the embodied and systemic experience of the encounter, highlighting how relationship development, shared process and collective becoming are shaped by site, shifting inclusions and exclusions of various people and practices, as well as alternative systems of knowledge production and exhibition/dissemination.

BACKGROUND

Think Tanks at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

To further articulate the structure of the case through which the affective capacities and challenges of the call and response approach will be analyzed, I will outline the civic engagement program called the Creative Ecosystem at YBCA, of which the think tanks on urban futures, labor, ecology and freedom are a part. The initial challenge for the program is to provide a site and structure where cohorts of invested community members, YBCA-presented artists and staff facilitators can gather over the course of a year, engage in dialog, artistic thinking and research, and manifest thoughtful and creative projects to address social justice and contemporary issues as well as instigate planned change, during a festival day on the art center's campus.

The charge of the program is largely driven by the hypothesis that culture precedes change and that collective imagination can be influenced through such projects. Jeff Chang describes this as one of the most potent roles of creatives:

[Artists and those who work and play in the culture center] help people to see what cannot yet be seen, hear the unheard, tell the untold. They make change feel not just possible, but inevitable. Every moment of major social change requires a collective leap of the imagination. Change presents itself not only in spontaneous and organized expressions of unrest and risk, but in explosions of mass creativity. (Chang 2014, 6)

Initial cohorts operating between 2015 and 2016 populate working groups investigating issues of the urban future, labor, ecology, and freedom. At the time of this research, the think tanks are composed of 30 fellows assembled to address a

particular question related to contemporary life and social justice. The corresponding research questions for these three cohorts are: “What is the future of urban life?”, “Why work?”, “What is a healthy ecosystem?” and “Can we design freedom?” The structure of working groups move the relationship between the individual and each question to a collective and social inquiry process.

The current structure for the year of group convenings begins with a day-long retreat, followed by monthly meetings which alternate between small project team meetings and public programs (including workshops, presentations and performances) for the entire group. The curricular material begins with a reader of approximately 40 items ranging from text to multimedia works of art. The reader emerges further as members of the think tank share their own work, perspectives and provocations.

The current selection process for the fellows is by online application. Selection is based on articulation of one’s desire to participate in creative practice to affect change, the clarity and strength of stated perspective in relation to the working group topic and availability to commit to the meeting dates (which occur primarily on Thursday evenings). The group is selected by a panel of YBCA staff and composed to include a variety of knowledge bodies, skills and professions as well as diversity in age, race, gender and nationhood. Each fellow is paid \$1,000 for their participation.

The think tank process culminates with a day of artistic and socially active community projects at YBCA. The nature of projects can be described as a sort of science fair meets talent show in mode. These projects illuminate a variety of creative responses to the initial question ranging from performances, installations and chapbooks, to soccer clinics and processual walks. This program day is called a YBCA Public Square, which occurs 2-3 times annually.

Challenges

The Art Center as Public Square

While the program title, “YBCA Public Square” is aspirational in nature, this research interrogates the art center through the nature and functions of a public square to determine the degree to which the art center serves as a civic gathering place of democratic discourse. In comparing the art center to a public square I will discuss some architectural, social and philosophical components of that type of site in order to claim how closely an art center such as YBCA can function as such. Additionally, while this analysis is informed by arguments regarding the larger concept and nuances of the contemporary “public sphere” I will restrict the case comparison of site specifically to the nature and live deliberative modes of a public square.

YBCA claims to serve as a modern day public square through the following rather lofty institutional statement to the general public in the context of marketing materials:

“Throughout time, the public square has served as an open place where people of all kinds have gathered to share new information, to surface big questions, and to enact change. As an art center and a citizen institution,

there is no better place for a modern-day public square than YBCA. That's because it will take the inspiration and creativity of all of us to create the change we want to see in the world and YBCA is committed to its role as an inclusive gathering place. During a YBCA Public Square, you're invited to join us for programs designed to spur conversation, cultivate empathy, and address the key questions of our time." (ybca.org 2016)

Given this statement, the notion of the public square serves, in this case, as a utopian ideal, rather than reflecting the actual conditions of the institutional site. The public square serves as a guiding frame. In the case of YBCA's program, the thesis that culture precedes change, is much aligned with Carol Becker's angle in her essay, "Microutopias: Public Practice in the Public Sphere." Here, she writes, "Art is often a kind of dreaming the world into being, a transmutation of thought into material reality, and an affirmation that the physical world begins in the incorporeal-in ideas...Art is the great anticipator." (Thompson 2012, 68) In practice, the Public Square program day at YBCA aims to draw awareness to social issues and channel creative possibilities for change into the public imagination among those who encounter the live exhibition. It serves as an anticipator and signals possibilities.

The public square, in studies of public life, is a site of encounter, democracy and freedom of speech. (Gehl 2010, 26) However, complicating the democratic ideals of public arenas are, as Nancy Fraser writes, issues of "normative legitimacy and political efficacy of communicative power" in an actual democracy. (Fraser 2007, 8) Fraser challenges Habermas' theory of the public sphere, arguing that rather than a fully democratic public sphere, a "bourgeois public sphere" exists in reality, thus accounting for those who are included in principle but excluded or marginalized in practice. (Fraser 2007, 12) She highlights the inequality within civil society, and

asserts that by tending to these disparities and proliferations, participation of various strata can be enhanced. Operating with an awareness of the stratified society to which Fraser refers, is both applicable and important to art center that aspires to be a civic institution. The degree to which the art center tends to these disparities in practice becomes apparent through the depth of commitment, strategy and active effort to increase access and equity.

In comparing the art center to a public square, I am referring to various events and gatherings as public deliberations, which require space and physical presence. In the case of the art center, this entails exchanges representing a range of styles, which go beyond oratory forums. In this subset of the public sphere, the publics may include the crowd or audience in co-presence. Additionally challenging is the fact that individuals belong to multiple publics, and therefore the experience of competing values and allegiances is inherent. In terms of belonging, E. Patrick Johnson notes how this multiplicity complicates loyalty and personal priorities of relationship: "Citizenship implies loyalty to one's own. Because we inhabit multiple social locations the labor of allegiance to one over the other becomes an impossible burden." (Johnson 2003, 103) Translated into the context of an art center, the charge for a nonprofit to generally serve the "public good" conflicts with the presence of multiple publics and loyalties. What is good for some publics is not for others, thus the systemic experience of an art encounter, relationship development, and shared process are driven by site and shifting inclusions and exclusions of various people and practices. To serve a variety of groups, the institution must pay

attention to the identified affiliations, shared experiences and tendencies of the audience, constantly in flux.

An art institution possesses more rules and mediations than a public square. In an arts context, with various cultural venues partnering with artists and presenting their work, the purity of free expression, even by the most liberal and well-intentioned institutions, is often muddied. Richard Schechner notes the complicated dynamic of such actors in his essay interrogating artistic citizenship: “On this middle path artists speak out and act up, but only within the rules of the game...These are all good people trying to make a living and to reform, if not revolutionize the social order” (Campbell and Martin 2006, 35) Truly facilitating a reciprocal partnership with culture makers from the community, requires the staff of a cultural venue to be highly sensitive to the complexities of power dynamics and the influence of stakeholders, and to take risks and accept a variety of outcomes within those partnerships. Additionally, Nato Thompson acknowledges the impact of site on rules for expression. “The increasing privatization of space, culture and time speaks to a powerful new system that artists and activists must reckon with – and work within.” (Thompson 2015, 78) He calls for a preservation of urban commons with a focus on the interactive use of public space. This preservation of an urban commons is a goal for a site such as YBCA with aspirations of a civic identity and public practice.

Regarding freedom of content, YBCA is a cultural nonprofit, which claims in its mission ambitions of social change, while operating in a building owned by the city

of San Francisco. The art center indeed houses expression and discourse, however, a set of protocols and formal relationships do exist. The site begs questions of public-private negotiations. How overtly political can the actors be inside a city building? Can public practice projects with goals of social justice, which may challenge current laws and governmental leaders, come to life in such an environment? An art center possesses more edges and stakeholders than that of a public square. As a nonprofit art center in the United States, dependent upon private donations, grants and other revenue streams to operate, the institution's mission and structure cannot truly reflect Habermas's concept of the public sphere as a site free from the influence of commerce and of the state.

Architecturally speaking, Jan Gehl describes the square as "an activity space proportioned to match the eye's ability." By this, he refers to a distance radius of approximately 110 yards, noting that "The basic blocks of urban architecture are movement space: the street, and experience space: the square." (Gehl 2010, 38) The square is a physical space to stop and engage. It signals that something is happening here. Physically, an art center is absolutely an experience space by presenting cultural programs with which visitors engage. However, ticket prices and open hours complicate and distinguish how this site is distinct from, say a public square that takes the form of an outdoor plaza with 24-hour free access. The Grand Lobby of YBCA is most physically like a public square with a long and spacious atrium and free access during open hours. Architecturally, the building was designed to contain

elements of a ship by the architect Fumihiko Maki. Portal-like windows and a balcony similar to a sailing vessel are part of this primary space.

In YBCA's lobby, one can observe visitors eating lunch, working on laptops, relaxing (even napping) in chairs, taking phone calls, perusing literature, chatting with desk staff and passersby as well as live art programs. These examples of activity align with Gehl's description of the social aspects of a city meeting place and a public square: "Opportunities to be there in person, face-to-face meetings and the surprising and unpredictable character of experiences are qualities tied to city space as meeting place." (Gehl 2010, 26) In this way, the YBCA lobby acts as a third space, a place to congregate separately from work or home. Third spaces, like public squares, often serve as anchors of community life because of their access and flexibility for congregation.

Beyond a general location for and facilitation of public life, a public square does not come with a mission, vision and agenda as a strategic cultural organization does. Therefore, with venue guidelines and increasing degrees of curation and direction, come greater deviations from the spirit of a public square and civic space. Every programmatic choice and facility protocol will directly or indirectly include some and exclude others. Given these challenges, how does an art center maximize the functions and ideals of a public square? (Aligning a civic site with a democratic curatorial practice, relative to the larger art field, drives the call and response

methodology to be described in a section later in this paper, “Democratic Communication Patterns in Call and Response”.)

YBCA is part of a wider network of art centers that are challenging themselves to create robust public dialogues of civic importance. For example, The Walker Art Center’s project, called *Open Field*, offers some insight into how an art center might more closely operate as a civic space and commons. The project took care to democratize community activities taking place on the property of that cultural institution. The staff asked:

“What might happen if we thought of our open space as a shared resource? How might it frame cultural participation as a collective and dynamic process? What form of public park could emerge from the context of an art center?... As a commons, the field was seen as a place for creative, social, and intellectual exchange and production rather than as a venue for the sort of presentation and cultural consumption typical for gallery, stage or lecture room.” (Schultz and Peters 2012, 32)

Slightly different than the components of a public square, the Walker defined the commons as “A resource shared by a group of people and a process by which the goods (material or intellectual) are managed collectively.” (Schultz and Peters 2012, 22) Through *Open Field*, they experimented with the role of museums, creativity and public life. In a program essay, Lewis Hyde remarked, “In considering ends or mission, it helps to know that a true commons is a managed thing; it operates through rules and constraints that the community develops and shapes to serve its ends in a sustainable manner.” (Schultz and Peters 2012, 95)

While YBCA is also experimenting with the role of the art center in relation to public life, the hypothesis and approach are distinct. According to the program catalog, the Walker was not especially interested in curating the experience of *Open Field*. That program was relatively structured for more citizen control. In approaches to socially cooperative art practice as Tom Finklepearl describes in his book, *What We Made*, the surveyed projects model a range of possible relationships with participants when curating people, as mapped by Sherry Arnstein's model "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" spanning from manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership and delegated power, to citizen control. (Finkelpearl 2013, 11) Regarding the Walker Art Center, Schultz writes, "*Open Field* is about building a more responsive and responsible museum that intentionally sets out to produce something of collective value *with* the public, rather than *for* them." The think tanks at YBCA, while sharing some of those intentions, take the shape of a year-long partnership with 30 citizen artists to conduct research and craft cultural encounters for the larger community. It is also about being more responsive and responsible.

What is the optimal balance between citizen culture making and curating of work in such a partnership? This requires a shift in both how the site is understood by visitors and operated from within. In the case of *Open Field*, Schultz references Nina Simon's call for "The need for scaffolding participation, creating the structures by which people understand and are comfortable with how to engage and contribute." (Schultz 2012, 35) She concludes that "rules, tools, seeding and meeting" plus resident artists are necessary for the scaffolding in this context. YBCA's think tanks

contain such components aiming to shape how YBCA can serve as a generative shared place of production.

Schultz writes of the institutional challenges and suggested ethos related to *Open*

Field:

“It’s a real challenge for an institution, even with a progressive history such as the Walker’s, to facilitate a truly improvised, open environment. It requires a dedicated staff, in attendance and at attention, to participate in and acknowledge the contributions and presence of others as well as patience with failure, faith in serendipity, the courage to relinquish control and a genuine openness to change.” (Schultz 2012, 45)

The challenges are familiar to those of the case described in this paper. Clarity regarding the scaffolding such as resources and the platform provided by the art center, as well as the opportunities and freedoms for operations within it allow visitors to determine the nature of their participation. Maintaining a light touch through this scaffolding in community member collaborations and accepting a variety of aesthetic and experiential outcomes as successful are transferrable best practices for working in partnership.

Through architectural cues, optimized access to the site, attention to and reduction of venue rules, and a diversity of planned and chance activities at the art center, the institution can operate more closely to how a public square functions in society as an ideally democratic and civic space. The public square remains a framing tool and utopian ideal of the actual operations of an art center. While the art center offers multiple forums for live deliberation among various publics, I will focus on two groups most closely tied to indicating the efficacy of YBCA’s think tank program: the

30 fellows engaged in the year-long process composing work and the visitors attending the live Public Square event to be described in the “Conclusion” section at the end of this paper.

Bay Area Landscape and Equity

To discuss YBCA as a civic institution and analyze the ways in which the site and the practice of the think tank program operate in relation to a public square, it is helpful to understand the contemporary urban environment in which the art center exists, posing another set of challenges. In comparison to other American cities, San Francisco has emerged as a leader of technology, creativity and social responsibility. The city also possesses the most disparate wealth inequities in the country, largely driven by the concentration of technological industries.

The potency of the Bay Area’s tech industry since the mid 90s deeply influenced the fabric of modern day San Francisco. Displacement and the corrosion of pre-tech San Francisco can be directly traced to the booms, the first beginning in 1997 and rising again in 2011. Ryan Centner’s description of the first tech boom (1997-2000) and the growing density of dot-commers outlines usage patterns in urban environments, through which dot-commers claim space through exclusive privileged consumption, such as expensive residences and large nonpublic celebrations, which he refers to as spatial capital:

“Wealth and population both spiked in San Francisco as billions of investment dollars flowed into the small seven-by-seven-mile space of the city, accompanied by thousands of white-collar migrants eager to take up

high- paying “smart jobs.” ... Simultaneously, noticeable alterations emerged in the urban landscape. Not only chic bars and eclectic boutiques, postindustrial apartments, and sleek office spaces appeared, but also circulating among these was a particular type of new urban resident: young, moneyed, hip, professional. This new city user, a “dot-commer” in most common parlance, became a dominant figure in the urban scene during a fleeting but consequential millennial moment (Centner 2008, 193).

Centner follows Bourdieu’s categorization of capital types, which lead to privileged consumption (of fun, leisure and culture) and discusses spatial capital as a result of staking claim to multiple forms of capital. In addition to economic capital, social capital (one’s network), cultural capital (education level or customs attached to prestige), and symbolic capital (any combination of the other three named types when the accorded special meaning becomes greater) play a role resulting in the power of dot-commers. The tech sector’s power play of capitals was compounded with gentrification efforts of private real estate developers and pro-growth government during the first tech boom (Centner 2008, 196).

The Nasdaq hit a record high of 5,048.62 on March 10, 2000, then plummeted 78 percent by mid-2002. That was the bust. With many people having made poorly timed ventures, the web business in general became very unpopular. Burned investors stayed away for years. Despite a slower time of ventures and Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) during the years that followed the bust, as well as the national economic downturn following September 11, 2001 and the 2008 financial meltdown in the United States, a handful of successful Bay Area-based startups were founded: Groupon (2008), Twitter (2006), Zynga (2007) and Foursquare (2009). San Francisco remained wealthy, posting a record amount of personal income tax

receipts in 2006, exceeding a previous mark set during the dot-com boom (Saskal 2006).

A new tech boom was declared in 2011 and projected to be fatter than the last. Also diverging from the first boom, companies like Twitter and Zynga have made San Francisco their home, rather than keeping headquarters in the Silicon Valley, thus creating tech jobs in the city and raising commercial rents. In 2011, Mayor Ed Lee incentivized these moves by working to pass a controversial tax break, which allows the technology companies in the mid-Market and Tenderloin areas to avoid payroll taxes on new hires for six years in exchange for upholding a lightly enforced community benefit agreement with the city. An increasing amount of young Silicon Valley workers, drawn by San Francisco's gourmet restaurants and artisanal bars, are also moving into the city as commuters and further raising rents (Talbot 2012). According to the 2012 HUD report, the median income in San Francisco for a 1-person household is \$72,100, making low income anything below \$63,350 and very low income below \$39,600. This average income is greater than New York City where low income is \$40,000 and very low is \$25,000. Talbot describes the updated snapshot of the city:

“San Francisco is the world's leading tech paradise. At a rate eclipsing the dot-com boom of the 1990s, tech companies are setting up shop in the city by the hundreds, drawn by its beauty and livability, as well as the deep pool of engineering talent here and, yes, city hall's increasingly tech-oriented policies...The city is currently home to more than 1,700 tech firms, which employ 44,000 workers, up a whopping 30 percent from just two years ago. And San Francisco has been the nation's top magnet for venture capital funding for three years in a row. Consequently, the distinction between Silicon Valley and San Francisco has all but disappeared. It is us, and we are it.” (Talbot 2012, 3)

With the deep impact of the tech industry and the two booms, the environment for a cultural institution's programs and audience has dramatically shifted in recent years. Influenced by the rapidly changing environment and what he considers "the deterioration in the methodologies of cultural production and dissemination", former YBCA Director Ken Foster calls for institutional adaptability in which "environment matters most". (Foster 2006, 9) Drastically shifting demographics are part of that environment. Chang calls California "the bleeding edge of the cultural generation gap." (calculated by subtracting the proportion of white children in a state from the proportion of white seniors.) (Chang 2014, 245) On the heels of a 2008 Arts Presenters convening of Bay Area cultural organizations hosted at YBCA, Foster notes in his 2010 paper "Thriving in an Uncertain World: Arts Presenting Change and the New Realities":

"We want younger, more diverse audiences but we want them on our terms and many cannot understand why diversity initiatives that fundamentally change nothing, don't seem to work. It is not a new phenomenon that the country is changing demographically and yet too many arts organizations stay focused on the dreams and demands of older, upper middle class white people. Demographics, politics, socio-economics, technological and cultural shifts – the environment is changing rapidly and dramatically. The organizations that survive will unquestionably be the ones that recognize these changes and are willing to reinvent their organizations for a new world and its new audiences." (Foster 2010, 9)

While acknowledging the conditions and charges outlined by Foster, constant change or "reinvention" is also a hallmark of capitalism and post-Fordist economies. Being adaptive and resilient can foreclose opportunities to invest in long-term social and economic changes. Therefore, in the context of an art center, interested in social

justice and change, creating intentional and incrementally mediated pathways for increased civic engagement over time can help to resist those foreclosures.

Additionally, the presence of multiple publics in such an inequitable landscape makes it impossible to be all things to all people. One of the challenges is simply having a target audience driven by market research. The existence of a “target audience” does not include all people. This is a tension within which YBCA’s think tanks (and most cultural programming) operate.

In the case of the think tanks, two groups of public participants engage with YBCA: the 30 fellows selected from an open call driving the research of the working groups; and the larger pool of attendees encountering the Public Square festival day. Therefore, to look at the work presented at the Public Square, the projects are *of* and *by* the fellows group, *for* the broader group of visitors.

The composition of YBCA’s think tank groups primarily reflects demographics and psychographics of the institution’s target audiences. According to audience segmentation survey results in a study conducted by the Enso creative agency for YBCA in 2015, the center’s base audience is composed of “creative change makers” described as self-identified change makers who believe in the power of art, culture and creativity. Most are advocacy oriented San Francisco women inclined toward the YBCA vision: “A community that thrives on inspiration.”. This constituency resides primarily in the North Beach, SOMA and Mission neighborhoods.

Additionally, these individuals are highly educated, highbrow readers and represent

all income ranges. They are liberal city-dwellers and active creators (especially crafting, photography and writing).

YBCA's secondary audience is composed of "upbeat engaged " individuals who follow a similar pattern to the above group, but all attitudes are slightly less intense. The foundational attitudes around creativity and change exist, but familiarity with YBCA is much lower. Creativity is slightly more resonant than proper arts and culture. These people live primarily in the Marina, Pacific Heights and Russian Hill neighborhoods. They are highly educated, but not necessarily wealthy.

Even basic logistics such as determining the day and time of think tank meetings, requiring an online application for participation and commitment for the duration of a year inevitably include and exclude various publics. For example, Thursday evening meetings indirectly privilege those with a work week, which follows 9-5 business hours, online applications assume computer access and base knowledge of technology. I note these nuances to illuminate the challenge of serving all people, despite a charge of equity and access. The design of the think tanks and opportunity for participation is most accurately for those who have the capacity to do a side project or participate in an extracurricular activity. While the think tanks inherently limit access in these ways, the output of the working groups can reach all people who are able to attend the site of the Public Square program (YBCA) during open hours. Further complicating access in the case of a free event, like the Public Square, are barriers such as leisure time and access to transportation. With YBCA going to a

“pay-what-you-can” base membership, anyone with the time and transportation can attend the activities for free, thus, moving closer to a public square.

How might a program prioritizing partnership between a civic institution, artists and community participants be best designed here? How can a cultural institution mobilize live human networks at a time of atrophied presence and a precarious sense of belonging and community in a rapidly changing city? What is a sound emergent practice for coming together as citizens to employ a sense of agency and self-determinism toward social change through creative and public practice? And if environment matters most, what is this environment?

YBCA was founded in 1993 as part of a project of the California Redevelopment Agency. Out of urban renewal and decades of struggle due to politics, displacement, and changing demographics, Yerba Buena Gardens opened in the heart of San Francisco and included a park, a children’s playground, ice rink, bowling alley, restaurants, hotels, a neighboring convention center, and YBCA. The evolution of the site was largely contested. Of the early stages of the redevelopment location, Rebecca Solnit writes of the place where:

“A fierce war began, one in which blood was shed and fires were set, in which bullies with fists and financial plans were held off by determined old men who lost much and won a little, about the total annihilation policy that created the opening for the Yerba Buena Center and the Moscone Center complex south of Market Street in downtown San Francisco.” (Solnit 2010, 87-88)

Built upon a contested site, which displaced a largely Filipino community, YBCA was created to anchor this place as a citizen institution that would be home to the diverse local arts community while serving to connect the Bay Area to the world. This founding mandate - to be connected to and part of the immediate geography - is the frame from which the institution operates today. With a budget just under \$10 million, YBCA is a mid-size non-collecting organization, collaborating with and learning from organizations both larger and smaller. Programs and projects piloted at YBCA have served as models for other organizations of varying size. There are only a few multi-disciplinary contemporary arts centers like YBCA in the United States. Based on its size, location and content, YBCA holds a distinct place in the Bay Area arts ecosystem, positioning it as the appropriate center to operate as a civic institution modeling approaches for increased access and equity. It is a place with the potential for cultivating what Robert Putnam describes as “Networks of civic engagement that facilitate the activities of politics, production and exchange.” Putnam maintains that “in these locales of tight civic engagement people know one another...; they meet frequently in non-work organizations and activities. They constitute a dense and rich social community.” (Kenney 2000, 191) YBCA has the potential to be that in-between place, an experience space with a building owned by the city and private nonprofit operations within.

To articulate the scope of activities housed on this campus, the YBCA buildings are also rented periodically throughout the year as part of its business model, hosting corporate sponsored activities in its venues with firms such as Apple, Google,

Twitter, Salesforce, Adobe, and Audi, and professional association events such as the Game Marketing Summit and the AIGA Gain Conference. Located in San Francisco's SOMA neighborhood, the institution is additionally surrounded by numerous tech and financial companies. YBCA is also part of a culture cluster: across the street is the Contemporary Jewish Museum, next door, the Museum of the African Diaspora, on the other side of the street, the newly expanded SFMOMA as well as the coming Gagosian Gallery.

So if environment matters most, how might an institution that aspires toward an identity and practice of civic engagement navigate the challenges named above?

Within this fraught systemic environment and politically contested site, lies a paradox of desires and realities. By illuminating a call and response pedagogy for a multi-modal dialogue incorporating cultural transmission, I will analyze techniques, which reckon with such conditions, working in partnership with community members for a potent public practice driven by artists.

THE PRACTICE:
A CALL AND RESPONSE APPROACH TO CURATING ENCOUNTER

In this section I will illuminate a specific methodology for engaging publics in partnership with a civic and cultural institution, through a call and response dialogic practice, in which all actors – the involved artists, community participants and staff facilitators from the institution - transmit, transform and generate material to form a live research process and public exhibition. The practice goes beyond the mode of verbal exchange to engage participants in multi-sensual encounters, which employ a variety of dialogic formats such as the somatic social, the commensual, the embodied and reflective listening as part of a nuanced facilitation of call and response. Here I argue the importance of these micro-moments as particulars, which structure dialogue to accommodate diverse styles and drive the relationship development of a cohort, shape the civic identity of a site as one which facilitates collective becoming, and seed culture shifts via little utopias and the formation of new meta-narratives. This civic public practice on a site emulating qualities of a public square discussed in the last section employs an increasingly democratic curatorial approach, driven by the call and response methodology with artists and 30 community participants. In referring to an increasingly democratic approach, I am comparing this call and response approach to more traditional museum practices, which employ a single individual or handful of curators to determine the content of that which is exhibited or presented at the cultural venue.

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Language

Who are the Fellows? We start with words, written and spoken. YBCA's initial call, the question "Can we design freedom?" elicited responses from successful applicants including the following excerpts:

Lack of global equity makes large-scale efforts populist theatre at best. We necessitate the small, the personal, the immediate. It is there that a future can be executed. (Ernesto Sopranni)

To design freedom, I propose we use data science and other interpretive lenses to derive musical principals such as improvisation, turn taking, call and response and circularity for use in the design on the social scale. (Brandon Brown)

Can WE design freedom? WE. No one left out, no one imprisoned by cages, borders, or even concepts delimiting who's an "artist." (Cecilia Lucas)

People could go out with their brushes, their cameras, their voice recorders, or just with their desire to engage others in impromptu debate. What new, unexpected institutions could emerge when people un-develop and dirty up the City? (Leslie Rabine)

It is our responsibility to do this/to design freedom... of all the people/places on earth - the people in and of san franfuckingcisco have (literally) the biggest responsibility to try with sincere fervor and with good fever. (Katie Bush)

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Live Assembly

Sara. Eduardo. Veronica. Xxavier...I welcome the fellows to the Youth Arts Lounge where YBCA hosts the first gathering of a cohort on a Saturday afternoon in March, a retreat day. While snacking on tangerines and settling in, they are greeted by Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Chief of Program and Pedagogy. He introduces the aspirations and desires for the fellows cohort with the research provocation "Can we design freedom?" sharing animated slides of past think tanks. He remarks:

Imagine you have the keys to a culture machine, and are accountable for feeding this City its alternative thought. How do you proliferate the probability that the margin will live on in San Francisco? Can a center of culture affect who gets to make the City?...The [YBCA think tank] laboratory intentionally brings together cohorts of the talented and curious to re-think City through unlikely lenses. Better, more productive questions might be framed like: “How do we maximize the resolve of new transplants to the Bay Area and leverage their resources against the needs of the people who have been here?” or more simply put: “How do we make a center for art that moves multiple San Franciscos?” “How do we make YBCA a home for both the engaged and disenfranchised?” Our strategy is to keep asking the good questions. (Marc Bamuthi Joseph, March 12, 2015)

Now gathered, this new cohort is at the beginning of their relay to transmit, transform and generate culture.

Through the above remarks, YBCA’s leadership expressed an awareness of the paradox of institutional desires and conditional realities. Joseph described the questions and experiments, as echos of the challenges and aspirations raised by Foster and Chang. By referring to “multiple San Franciscos”, Joseph pointed to those who are included in principle but excluded or marginalized in practice. These comments signaled an awareness of the stratified society to which Fraser refers, thus making it possible for the practice Joseph shaped at YBCA to tend to the disparities, proliferations and participation of various strata.

“Where does freedom live in the body?” Joseph asks. The Fellows pair off and walk down the hall to converse and answer this question with a new acquaintance. For some, passionate hand gestures fly. Others lean over the 2nd floor balcony, speaking slowly and looking off to organize thoughts. Early in the retreat, Bill T. Jones visits

the Fellows. “Are you an artist or are you an activist? Activists have to be concerned with a result.” His provocations were perhaps premature for the group, before they’ve had the opportunity for long introductions and discussion. Jones wasn’t budging. Various people in the room define themselves as artists, activists, both and none. For Jones, “both” was not an acceptable response, and this made a handful of participants uncomfortable. Eyes widened. “Freedom is not free. How are we defining freedom?” Jones asks next. Weidong Wang, responds, recounting his participation in the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. Jones, respectfully, but contrarily responds, “Isn’t collective action like a student movement just another regime?” Jones openly challenged the potency of art, admitting that telling a personal story on stage, like the one of his partner’s Jewish mother, animating his work *Analogy/Dora: Tramontane* does not, necessarily move people to take action. The room was alive, personal and vulnerable during such moments of ambiguity, exemplifying this ping-pong of call and response through artistic and political discourse.

Dynamic Soul in Call and Response

Jazz Aesthetic

The roots of call and response trace back to various spiritual and music traditions, notably in African-American forms and evolutions including gospel, blues, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, jazz and hip hop. Joseph, creator of the Creative Ecosystem think tank program at YBCA, notes jazz, soul and party as key elements for the call and response exchanges deployed in the context of the creative community hosted

at the art center. Joseph is located in Oakland with Haitian ancestry and acknowledges black culture, rhythms and geographies as influences on his work as an artist, pedagogue and facilitator:

“I think some of it is African-descended-in-the-United-States-ness. A *lot* of it is hip-hop. The music was in my headphones but the culture was *everywhere*. And the culture is most keenly manifest in reflection, in relationship; whether it's the cypher or the battle or just the call and response—what I call the “Yes, yes, y'all!” That's part of who we are.” (Brueckner 2014, 1)

“Yes, yes, y'all” is akin to the improvisational practice of responding and building with the statement “yes, and...” The improvisation Joseph describes entails listening, building and emergent collaborative creation. The back and forth generates an attunement among participants and expands opportunities for each person to be involved in a collective experience. This improvisational quality is at the core of the call and response approach to curating encounter as demonstrated through the YBCA think tanks.

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Objects

With the YBCA think tank investigating notions of freedom, the facilitators aim to cultivate an environment for participants to act as both influencers and be influenced. There is time for personal introductions during which, the Fellows present a tool or instrument they use to access freedom or illuminate a relationship to a freedom practice. They are also encouraged to share perspective and skills. Eduardo Valadez reveals his father's knife, a testament to his own choice of culinary pursuits. He confidently holds it high with a sense of both respect and defiance. Veronica Jackson shows her museum membership cards, since art is her channel to

feeling free. Chinaka Hodge tears up as she presents her aunt's sieve, with which she makes sacred family recipes.

Each participant also brings a book to leave on YBCA's shelf for the duration of the fellowship; this library physically featuring a collective body of knowledge meaningful to the group to be shared with the art center's staff and public. This collection created an object-based call and response, wrapped in meaning, the accretion of which moves from the personal to the collective. These people in a room together. These books in a pile together. This illustrated a form of the "yes, yes y'all".

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Emergent Curriculum

When I provide closing announcements later in the day, I note the date of the next meeting, with only a loose outline of the content. Part of the call and response related to the program planning is to listen to the needs and desires of the 30 people gathered, debrief and plan accordingly to help drive their inquiry forward. For staff it's a shorter lead on planning than the usual institutional impulse. The participants were already teaching each other from their various perspectives and experiences. The work at the retreat informed the next facilitation. This programmatic improvisation is braided throughout the year.

Additionally, a quality of soulfulness, a multifaceted sense of inclusivity within the call and response style, stems from a full body participation in the process drawing

on a variety of perceptive intelligences. Past think tank participants Sharon Bridgforth and Omi Osun Joni Jones write about specific elements of a jazz aesthetic applied to facilitation and creative work, which compose dynamics of call and response. These elements include presence, breath, listening, improvisation, simultaneous truths, collaboration, virtuosity and body-centeredness. According to Jones, these collaborative communication skills must be cultivated and practiced among facilitators and participants of the call and response. Components of which include:

“Body-to-body present-ness, the immersion of individual artistry through a strong community ethos, the necessity for and valorizing of multiplicity, the activism inherent in moments of choice and empowerment...to create the method known for social reconstruction known as the jazz aesthetic.” (Jones et al 2010, 10)

These are also goals for the YBCA think tanks. Having participated in iterations of the YBCA think tanks, Bridgforth and Jones have influenced and developed the current culture, communication style and approach for the group work.

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through a Jazz Aesthetic

One Public Square project called *Dreaming the Neighborhoods*, developed by Jones and Paula Hooper, specifically manifested the concept of simultaneous truths, listening and presence, all components of her framework for a jazz aesthetic. A clothesline, a white fence and outdoor furniture, while installed in a conference room, call forth the feeling of a residential back yard. In this space, Jones invites visitors from the same zip code to discuss the services, environment and spirit they would like to experience in their imagined neighborhood. An additional collaborator

Natalie Freed, a computer scientist, maps these collected traits onto a diagram of the city space. Once printed, these shared visions are affixed to the clothesline. Jones describes the inspiration for her project:

The people who live in my neighborhood are from many different parts of the earth, lots of different backgrounds. The people who live in my neighborhood understand race, class, gender, sexuality, nationhood. They're not afraid to talk about those things. They're willing to acknowledge their own places of fear and concern. Different ages, different ways of living in the world. Those are the people I'd be excited to live with. The homogeneity of some neighborhoods is detrimental to the soul. I think we are here truly on the planet to expand our sense of ourselves and we do that in contrast, not in similarity, that's how I think my neighborhood would flourish – it would just make it a magnificent place to be. (Omi Osun Joni Jones, November 7, 2015)

Here we see a civic-minded project authored by Jones within the aspirational Public Square, which employs call and response. The work landed in a fuzzy zone between desires for a city in contrast to the conditional realities of that place. Still, for Jones, the act of asking “What-if?” was a productive step to cultivate a culture shift of imagining differently in order to navigate this paradox. The asking was better than not asking and created a variety of surprises and connections among visitors in the installation during the Public Square.

Somatic Social Relationships

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through the Somatic Social

The urban futures think tank cohort meets for the first time in February 2015. During their initial gathering, they work with the Institute for the Future (ITF) and attend Kyle Abraham's performance of *Pavement* in the YBCA Forum. A dance party DJed by King Britt follows in the YBCA Grand Lobby. The evening transitioned in

mode from a cerebral dialogue instigated by IFTF, to the body witnessed in performance during *Pavement*, to a full body participation at the DJ party.

A cypher forms on the dark and sweaty dance floor. Members of Abraham's company along with think tank participants take turns dipping, spinning, grooving. The DJ, Britt believes in freedom through party, one avenue to full body presence, which Joseph includes in order to embed dynamic soul into the encounter. To be vulnerable, witnessed and celebrated holistically on the dance floor has the potential to build a sense of belonging. This exemplifies the somatic social.

The somatic exchange of social life brings forth sensory dimensionality and liveness. Emotions are both felt and cognitive, and while much collaborative work relies on some degree of intuition and "body thinking," concrete biological elements of live encounters are part of the potency. Joseph echoes these values in his occasional inclusion of this party mode in the think tank program design:

"This isn't a purely an intellectual exercise, this is in the body, it is an exercise in witness of artistic mastery and its also meant to move you in your shoulders, your neck and your hips – if we're not dancing, what's the point? So it's all of that. Putting art at the center of inquiry that's launching something different, a unique perspective on how the future gets made."
(Marc Bamuthi Joseph, March 11, 2015)

Ultimately the somatic social components of curated events can increase the degree of holistic connection if a sense of comfort exists around bodily connection.

Attention to and choreographic cues for these haptic transferences can be helpful in this call and response methodology because of the way these elements have the

potential to seal bonds and cultivate relationships. Both Finklepearl and Thompson write similarly regarding the establishment and deepening of relationships through the haptic in socially engaged art:

Part of the appeal of collaborative practice could be the nonvirtual aspect of it. Actually sitting down and talking to people live, in person, is an integral aspect of almost all socially interactive and collaborative work...I'm working on now through an analysis of collaborative or collective labor, the haptic experience of bodily proximity, movement and so on as forms of affective communication. This work definitely touches on issues that come up in the sciences and social sciences around cognition, empathy, and bodily intelligence. (Finklepearl 2013, 125)

As opposed to political theory or critique, the encounters enact a range of transformations that exceed mere words. They are somatic. They are lived. These encounters come with feelings as well as ideas. This is a politics of doing that provides an entirely unique and powerful set of potentialities. (Thompson 2015, 145)

While many collaborative processes include the somatic social, this way of relating in public dialogue seals bonds through multi-sensual encounters, which contribute to the YBCA think tanks. In addition to co-presence and physical movement, breaking bread together, eating and drinking also enhance social relations during live assembly and are a component of call and response as defined in this paper. Sharing food can be an intimate experience. Sally Banes and Andre Lepecki delve into such sensory components of the live encounter in their collection *The Senses in Performance*, which investigates the biopolitics of “where the corporeal meets the social, the somatic meets the historical, the cultural meets the biological, and imagination meets flesh.” (Banes and Lepecki 2007, 1) Biologically mediated states modulated through sensory triggers reinforce memories and associations, making the role of the senses one to tend to for group bonding.

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through the Commensual

The aroma of coconut curry permeates the lounge as Azalina Eusope prepares a Malaysian dinner for the think tank group. Her generous care for the flavors as she adds seeds and herbs reflects the care and respect expressed among the fellows. With plates filled and wine flowing, the participants return to the café tables to dine in small groups. The conversations rise over the Stevie Wonder playlist “Free Stevie”, which Hodge compiled. During dinner Hope Mohr outlines the project research she is conducting with the Trisha Brown Company. Sara Bahat discusses her children and working with the New York City government. Laughter. Numbers exchanged. Bonds sealed over a meal. Also during the meal one woman asks if she may donate her stipend toward the library. Another asks privately if she can forgo the honorarium. A respectful socioeconomic awareness and generosity entered the culture of this group.

Dining together is more than just sharing food and drink. This is what Seremetakis calls the commensual, a condition, which through sensory exchange and memory creates and reinforces meaning associated with the involved people and places:

Commensality can be defined as the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling. Historical consciousness and other forms of knowledge are created and then replicated in time and space through commensal ethics and exchange. Here each sense witnesses and records the commensal history of the others. In this type of exchange, history, knowledge, feeling and the senses become embedded in the material culture and its components: specific artifacts, places and performances. (Seremetakis 1994, 37)

The result of the formed social memory resulting from shared meals, particularly if positive or empathetic, can contribute to the movement of individuals toward a collective accountability and support system. This is an experience which enables collaboration. In the case of YBCA's think tanks, the shared meals are curated to guide the visceral experience to one of warmth, generosity, mutual care, abundance and belonging. During these times, the sensorially mediated event is the place from which the call and response communication takes place. A certain neighborliness enacted during these commensal exchanges further facilitates a frame of possibility, by potentially altering the perceptions of the world through sensory input and new memory creation in relationship to others sharing the experience. This is part of how the plastic brain responds to performance, as it modifies and organizes sensations, ultimately impacting how one experiences the world. (Di Benedetto 2010, 2) Seremetakis further unpacks the commensal to explain how sharing impacts the formation of memory:

The act of exchange is registered on the senses that seal it as a social relation...The memory of one sense is stored in another: that of tactility in sound, of hearing in taste, of sight in sound. Sensory memory is a form of storage. Storage is always the embodiment and conservation of experiences, persons and matter in vessels of alterity. The awakening of the senses is awakening the capacity for memory, of intangible memory, to be awake is to remember, and one remembers through the senses, via substance...Memory is stored in substances that are *shared*, just as substances are stored in social memory, which is sensory. (Seremetakis 1994, 28)

The storage of memory created both via linked senses as well as shared social experiences becomes part of the group material and shared history, co-created during the monthly gatherings. To dance together, to dine together, to incorporate the somatic social into the think tank process can work to bond individuals,

generating belonging and neighborliness, which in turn can lead to a trust and potency of the collective. Add to that the previously discussed components of improvisation, listening, acknowledging multiple truths and body-to-body presence, as well as a multiplicity of modes for assembly and you have key ingredients for the call and response approach stemming from dynamic soul.

Democratic Communication Patterns in Call and Response

Cultivating a Range of Deliberative Modes

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Art Encounter

In the gallery the fellows are given time to explore and consider how they might re-design the space. The current work in the galleries includes a Samara Golden solo show, *A Trap in Soft Division*, as well as *Take This Hammer: Art and Media Activism from the Bay Area*. With a range of disciplines, creative practices and ways of looking among the group, the conversation to imagine something new appeared to seed the future possibility of collaboration. One artist from the latter show, Favianna Rodriguez, addresses the group following the visit. Rodriguez, who moved from a primarily activist role to one combining culture and activism tells the story of coming out about her abortion 12 years after it occurred. At the time of the abortion, she was a 4.0 student at U.C. Berkeley. For Rodriguez, pleasure is freedom and the ideas she spreads through her art aim to combat shame and promote women's reproductive rights. Addressing the group, Rodriguez maintains that change makers must shift beliefs before systems will change, which occurred in her case by being

public around abortion combined with a wave of others coming out. Here Rodriguez positions the power of collective action. Following her presentation, Stephen Funk, inspired to support the actions of others in the group, responds to the talk with a call for the fellows to join him in his upcoming April Fools Day prank to “pop the bubble” at Twitter. The group begins a Slack to facilitate ongoing digital conversations with the goal of supporting each other’s individual projects such as Funk’s. Now connected and forming relationships, the participants called upon each other.

To further consider the range of deliberative modes cultivated in this approach to public practice, I look to Jan Cohen Cruz’s translation of the historical qualities of call and response into a theater context:

“Geneva Smitherman defines call and response as ‘spontaneous *verbal and non-verbal* interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speakers statements (‘calls’) are punctuated by expressions (‘responses’) from the listener.’ ...The process is *iterative*: the call may be initiated from a community, and the response may come from an artist, who then sets forth a new call directed at an audience.” (Cohen-Cruz 2010, 1)

Who is making the call and response shifts organically in the case with Rodriguez’s engagement, from guest artist and presenter to fellow. The nature of call and response as process-oriented and iterative applies to the case of the YBCA think tanks, in that each takes place over the course of a year, and each group process is culturally informed by the last and evolves based on the composition and collective personality of the assembled individuals. Similar to a social innovation lab, call and response participants “Need to allow time for consecutive phases of exploring and

evaluating, diverging and converging.” (Labcraft 2014, 31) Early phases of YBCA’s working groups were led by Christina Knight (Future Soul think tank) and Kyla Searle (Body Politic think tank). Searle reflects, “It is a call and response, a position of accountability to the people. This strategy requires the confrontation of power, privilege, and institutional value systems; to fully acknowledge the Ecosystem, the institution (and those of us who work for it) must be prepared to transform.” Her early acknowledgement of imperfect conditions for the work reveals the negotiation of desires and conditions and awareness involved from the beginning of the think tank program. Even early on, versions of this call and response exchange were employed to engender more civic and community-centered actions. In 2015, the addition of staff member Chinaka Hodge brought organizing elements of the Oakland-based *Life is Living* festival into the latest iteration of the program. Other evolutions through the iterations of the think tanks include variations in how porous the cohorts are in terms of inviting new participants at different points in the process. After several experiments regarding ideal group size and commitment, the structure of 30 consistent fellows meeting monthly for a year has shown to yield the most cohesive group process in the context of YBCA and the most well-developed collaborative projects exhibited at the Public Square.

These projects are what can be referred to as “little utopias”, a form of engaged performance as Cohen-Cruz defines it:

“The value of the relationships developed through engaging performance comes to the fore, characterized by paying attention to a social call and making a public, collaborative response. Such performances provide the

opportunity to see a *little utopia*. Something that doesn't entirely exist in the world except as a possibility." (Cohen-Cruz 2010, 16)

The opportunity for the public to attend and participate in the YBCA Public Square is another form of live deliberation manifested through the YBCA think tanks. In this context, visitors encounter the various projects exhibited across the campus, a range of responses to the research questions of the think tank group.

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Little Utopias

Tourists and families follow a figure in a yellow, red, black and white fringe, his face obscured, his movements punctuating a procession along with a drummer and another dancer dressed in all white. Rashad Pridgen's *Bio Spirit Safety Suit* performance in the Yerba Buena Gardens adjacent to YBCA is one response to the year of passing, transforming, and generating ideas and material to imagine the future of urban life. His work functioned as both a ritual for those who have passed away from AIDS as well as a vision for sexual education and health. At the YBCA Public Square on November 7, 2015, the urban futures cohort presented twelve projects, which offer a variety of encounters. Emily Dellas, a chef, cooks a Thanksgiving of the future, called *Lingua Lengua*, imagining sustainable and healthy food practices with a menu including drought resistant crops and fermented items. In YBCA's second floor Hub she tends to her Bunsen burner while hosting an open meal for four hours, introducing new visitors to each other and educating the group on the food systems, which she is visioning for the future. This is Dellas's "little utopia". Both of these projects as well as the others presented on this day, offered possibilities as a public collaborative response, which emerged from a social call.

This public collaborative response, which composed the YBCA Public Square brought together a larger audience than any of the individual think tank meetings, becoming another forum for encounter and live deliberation, grappling with social questions of the contemporary moment.

Additional elements of call and response, specifically from the field of sociology, also inform the approach to curating encounter at the art center described in this paper. The process allowing for a variety of deliberative modes is durational and open as members of the *Live Methods* lab at Goldsmiths University describe this action research process:

The dialogic communication is stretched over durations of time and space; operating in stages and across different practitioners. Call-and-response is premised upon a process of exchange that involves stages whereby materials are passed and returned, transformed, only to be carried over to the next practitioner involved in the *relay of co-production*. So, new responsive productions are not foreclosed, they can be a source of interaction at any time a new process of creation is generated. (Puwar and Sharma 2012, 54-55)

From the initial retreat to the public exhibition, the “relay of co-production” from the circulation and transformation of materials among the group of 30 fellows at YBCA makes a variety of public dialogues possible. From group meetings to the Public Square, all actors participate in generative transmission and no one is ever continuously the spectator. This loop of engagement fosters what Cohen-Cruz refers to as “concomitant analysis and reflection”. (Cohen-Cruz 2010,176) In this form of action research and collaborative knowledge production, individual roles are

continually shifting.

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Multiple Knowledge Sources

In the case of the think tanks, for example, collectively the fellows develop a reader of selected texts and media, which reflects the spirit of the group as well as curricular items from YBCA. Submissions in advance of the retreat for the freedom cohort serve as another means of introduction ranging from the *Pale Blue Dot* video by Carl Sagan, *Beyond the Engine* by Alyssa Battistoni and *Of Our Own Making: Inmates Redesign Prisons for Rehabilitation* by Kurt Kohlstedt to *The Artist's Struggle for Integrity* by James Baldwin and several manifestos. The contributions of the Fellows offer content intended to evolve or complicate the question at hand. The passing begins. A call and response of knowledge transmission and sources.

This democratic pattern of communication among the group contributes to the expression moving from the personal to the collective. To pass and transform material among a group of creators allows the exhibition to be authored by a multiplicity of voices. This aligns with Cohen-Cruz's perspective regarding devised processes, which through the collective structure validate a variety of knowledge sources. "Devising reflects the belief that all of us can be expressive in ways worthy of attention, gesturing towards the democratic impulse in engaged work." (Cohen-Cruz 2010, 5) Devised processes also reinforce a sense of belonging, which is cultivated when one feels both that they are complimentary to and offer something of value to the environment. Along these lines, she concludes, "Call and response brings the fruits of that relationship to the public sphere: something in our shared

life speaks urgently to the artist and the work s/he consequently makes goes beyond personal expression.” (Cohen-Cruz 2010, 2)

In the dialogic flows of call and response I describe, active roles are played by artist, institution and community participants. Therefore, in cultivating a range of deliberative modes, I focus on the methods which position collaborating publics in partnership. Jeffrey Breese’s writing about public sociology (also referred to as participatory action research, community-based research, empowerment research or service learning), states:

At the heart of public sociology is the *partnering* of various "publics" in the community. The acknowledgement here is that members of the community are potentially valuable colleagues in addressing, studying, and tackling social problems and concerns. This approach calls for the establishment of participatory relationships with community members to forward community action...Public sociologists commit to not doing research and analysis "for" the community, but rather it is social science executed "with" the community. Hence, the key issues of "knowledge for whom" and "knowledge for what" are recast by public sociology. (Breese 2011, 80)

Components of space, duration, embodiment and collectivity in curating process and people, become activated in this call and response curatorial practice. Breese highlights that while any group’s boundaries include some and exclude others, the priority should be on those who will be most affected by the results. For this reason the YBCA Fellows are selected to reflect the target audience for the art center. Breese identifies three central features to what he calls “public sociology” including a collaborative enterprise between researchers and community members, the democratizing of knowledge by validating multiple sources of knowledge and

promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and of dissemination, and the goal of social action for the purpose of achieving social change and social justice.

(Breese 2011, 78) The YBCA Public Square is based on the idea of creative public intervention and engagement as well as a multiplicity of authors. This presentation of responses to a research question engaged by the fellows over the course of a year grows projects with which a larger group of visitors may engage in the public realm.

The public practice through call and response is also in many ways curating people, curating live assembly and prompting dialogue by triangulating artists, publics and place for cross-disciplinary collaborations. Also drawing from the field of sociology, Sanjay Sharma and Nirwal Puwar cite publicness, creative collaboration and the research process of exhibiting as part of curating a research community:

The intention is to adapt some of the practices of the curator, and grasp 'curating as a research process' that embraces creativity and experimentation in the production of public knowledge...Curating can involve processual participatory activities, engendering 'new practices, new meanings, values and relations between things'. Curating sociology therefore should not be reduced to a set of research techniques or methods. Rather, it is a methodological commitment to collaborative knowledge production for *creative public intervention and engagement*. (Puwar and Sharma 2012, 43)

For the YBCA think tanks, that creative public intervention manifests during the Public Square through a live exhibition of "little utopias". The call and response approach is one such methodological commitment to produce such engagements and encounters at the art center to invite publics to consider issues and systems of the urban future, labor, ecology and freedom. This curatorial approach for ongoing collaborative knowledge production and transmission, prioritizes process and

relationship. While taking steps to open up channels for various publics by curating a process which allows for a variety of perspectives in partnership, YBCA moves closer to serving its founding mandate. This mandate, however, to be “the people’s art center” is ultimately an impossible goal, and therefore must be clarified to prioritize some publics over others. To return to Fraser’s argument outlined earlier, even civic-minded organizations with democratic intentions can still include all in principle but exclude or marginalize certain publics in practice:

In stratified societies, unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles. The result is the development of powerful informal pressures that marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday life contexts and in official public spheres. (Fraser 1990, 64)

The marginalization of contributions and unequally valued cultural styles often enter an art center through traditional curatorial gatekeepers and an existing art canon, which represents some publics more prominently than others. Therefore, a more collective curatorial approach such as the call and response method along with institutional choices to increase access and equity, through a free membership level and admission to the Public Square, help to incrementally address the stratification to which Fraser refers. Even while tending to these disparities at YBCA, the shape of the opportunity to work in the think tank group inevitably excludes various publics. Still, the range of deliberative modes and projects revealing a variety of aesthetics generated by citizen artists and facilitated through this process validate knowledge from a variety of sources and publics. In this way, the call and response approach moves the operations toward one of a more civic practice.

The Encounter: Science Fair Meets Talent Show

Engaging in a call and response methodology is both practice-based research and research-based practice. Even the exhibitionary field is still a mode of research. (Puwar and Sharma 2012) To expand upon the variety of aesthetics, which appear in the exhibitionary field during the day of the Public Square, I will illuminate a range of project outcomes generated by citizen artists through this process. This section discusses of the types of work that the call and response method can yield. This is where projects shape the encounters, which can be described in mode as a sort of science fair meets talent show. Earlier in articulating some learnings from the Walker Art Center's *Open Field* project, which works with community culture makers, Schultz noted the importance of accepting a variety of aesthetic and experiential outcomes as successful. This is crucial for the institution partnering with 30 people at a time to create a live exhibition, resulting from a durational pedagogical project. Sociological encounters involve dialogue, not only verbal but through a variety of creative knowledge practices, including those guided by educational pedagogy and strategies of assembly. (Puwar and Sharma 2012, 48-49)

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Ambiguous Creative Encounters

The extended dialogue of the YBCA think tanks manifests through the projects in the exhibition. For example, at the YBCA Public Square on November 7, 2015, the urban futures cohort presented twelve projects, which offer a variety of encounters. *Post Bills*, a project by Evan Bissell includes a zine, accompanied by a large banner that hangs in the Grand Lobby. The text contains essays about culture and capital in San

Francisco, attacking inclusion which does not, in his opinion, go far enough:

“Performative kindness is the appearance of acceptance with the retention of the material conditions of inequity.” Bissell’s words asked visitors to reconsider the depth of their participation or complicity with the city’s complex environment, offering his own, yet-to-be-fulfilled ideas for a more equitable future.

At the Public Square, research questions are critically transformed into aesthetic practices and encounters in the public realm. These co-productions are the manifestations of a process of inquiry and artistic thinking. Performance and creative practices involve numerous ways of communicating, thus allowing for results that range from didacticism to ambiguity. The ambiguity in communication through artistic practices versus the direct messaging and obvious utility of activism creates more possibilities for interpretation and meaning making. By skirting a direct message through this ambiguity, cross disciplinary cultural responses possess a particular vitality and potency. In his book, *Seeing Power*, Nato Thompson discusses the possibility generated by certain socially engaged art that results from a collective process of generating work. The call and response pedagogy of the YBCA think tanks are one such collective process. In a world of coercive visual advertising the public is often skeptical of legible calls to action. To this end, Thompson states, “In an ambiguous cultural intervention, the inability for a viewer to pin down a work’s intentions is the very thing that makes the dynamic significant.” (Thompson 2015, 48) It is from this fuzzy position that socially engaged art facilitates generative possibilities, the re-imagining of structures and the re-framing of

relationships. In that space, curiosity can bring about the conditions for collective becoming. Grant Kester describes a similar approach to co-produced works, what he terms “dialogical art”, which land them between the direct legibility of activism and disruptive avant garde art. He discusses the potency of these types of art, which emerge from the cumulative process of exchange and dialogue. As a result, these works create “A locus of discursive exchange and negotiation.” (Kester 2014, 16) Many projects emerging from the call and response process and appearing at the YBCA Public Square demand such negotiation.

Call and Response: Dialogic Practice Through Cross Sector Collaboration

Elizabeth Cooper and Tessa Wills, part of the cohort responding to the labor question “Why work?”, shoot a faux TED talk regarding their ideas about emotional labor in the YBCA Screening Room. They use a recognizable mainstream form of knowledge dissemination to project a professional and seemingly factual delivery of their opinionated narrative regarding an intangible topic. In this way they advocated for the importance of considering labor, not through productivity or compensation, but rather via an emotional lens. In business suits, waxing on about their care and emotional labor for friendships and artistic pursuits, Cooper and Wills introduced distinct thoughts and feelings in a form with which many people have literacy. This project contained the fuzzy components noted above, thus requiring negotiation.

Additionally, since cross-sector collaboration is also a part of the call and response process, which yields the encounters composing the YBCA Public Square, the

individuals in the current group possess backgrounds ranging from art, economics, architecture and tech, to law, design and education. In the essay “Living Takes Many Forms”, Shannon Jackson emphasizes that “Cross-sector engagement exposes and complicates our awareness of the systems and processes that coordinate and sustain social life.” (Thompson ed. 2012, 93) For example when Jones, a theater artist collaborates with Freed, the computer scientist on her previously described project, *Dreaming the Neighborhoods*, they each negotiate the application of skills within their respective fields and then re-purpose those skills and share languages to drive a distinct type of public engagement. Cross sector group process drives the work of the YBCA think tanks and affects the reading of those projects by the public.

The YBCA Public Square is populated by cross disciplinary encounters, which find their shape through the call and response pedagogy. The acceptance of a variety of aesthetic and experiential outcomes as valid allow the works produced by members of the YBCA think tanks to communicate on their own terms. Ambiguity and negotiation are part of these encounters, thus allowing for more interpretations and possibilities.

CONCLUSION

Systemic Capacities of an Affective Public Practice

Within the paradox of institutional desires and conditional realities, how do the techniques described facilitate a potent public practice driven by artists working in partnership with community members? What are the affective capacities of a call and response pedagogy for curating encounter at a site, which aspires to emulate functions of a public square? Given the challenges of developing an identity and practice of civic engagement in an environment of inequity, why is this approach to curation appropriate to the site of YBCA and how is it conducive to the institution's particular role in the city? And finally, what is the role of practices that focus on the somatic experience of inequality, the multi-sensual nature of the city, and the micro-interactions of daily life? The nuanced moments described in the last section connect these delicate and fragile domains to wider social systems by structuring dialogue to accommodate diverse styles and drive the relationship development of a cohort, shape the civic identity of a site as one which facilitates collective becoming, and seed culture shifts via little utopias and the formation of new meta-narratives.

Connecting Creative Change Makers

By the third meeting of the Ecology thing tank, Bruce Hartsough and Siobhan Cronin had each other's numbers and connected periodically outside of YBCA. Involved with the Bay Nature group, Hartsough particularly enjoyed discussing ecological justice with Cronin, a cellist and dance artist who conducted a series of nature-based movement studies with Deborah Hay. Both read Naomi Klein's book, *This Changes*

Everything in tandem. For their joint project, Hartsough, who has been a trail docent for years combined his skills as an educator with Cronin's cello compositions illuminating extinct bird songs of the region. Their work situated in the Front Door Gallery also offered information to visitors regarding more ongoing conservation efforts, which Hartsough organizes beyond YBCA. When Hartsough connected with Cronin, the larger think tank group, and with visitors during the Public Square, he said it amplified his own passion and sense of participation in an issue about which he cares deeply. Regarding his work with the think tank, he cited the Howard Zinn quote: "We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world." Now the think tank is far from "millions" however the spirit is one of collective action, the result of being connected and in process with others.

The nature of belonging to these cohort groups of civically engaged creative citizens is nuanced by a jazz aesthetic and through the somatic social, yielding a certain type of bond distinct from other socially cooperative art collaborations. To be in process together and to make something together for the community of which you are a part cultivates a cohort with a sense of shared history, direction, meaning, or motivation. In a relatively transient city, (the average stay for a Bay Area resident is six years according to the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau,) seeding networks of civic engagement with an awareness of a stratified society makes collective action over time more possible. Relationships formed over time, through multisensory modes of togetherness and exchange, as well as the co-creation of projects facilitate

shared values and bonds. To belong is to be in a relationship containing both the experience of feeling valued, needed, and accepted, and the perception that we somehow complement the system or environment.

Two years after an early iteration of the YBCA think tank focused on Body Politics concluded, participants still gather around the topic. Laurel Butler and Ron Ragin, now living on opposite coasts still have conversations seeded from their shared group process. When asked to characterize the bond, Butler noted that the glue for she and Ragin included the vulnerable and earnest conversations about challenging topics, which don't usually make it to your average dinner party. She said that they were gathered around an idea they all cared about, but besides that, more things were different than similar (experiences, perspectives, professions) among those convened. Bringing together people who don't normally talk to each other, in a space where they can discuss things they care deeply about is a strategy borrowed from social innovation labs and organizing. (Labcraft 2014) The think tank groups are selected to be diverse in age, race, class, gender, occupation, nationhood and worldview, since opposing perspectives build depth and strength of relationships. (Labcraft 2014) To return to the previous example, Hartsough, a Marin resident is retired and in his 60s. Cronin, 35, lives in Oakland, works full time as an artist. The think tank structure facilitated this intergenerational friendship, collaboration and organizing. While the call and response method for public practice among these groups of 30 people at a time can't be all things to all people, many involved in the durational and multimodal process have developed enduring bonds and networks

where they did not previously exist, thus moving active gestures from individual behavior to the collective.

These interconnected relationships can be, at their most vital, the seeds of movement building. People who share values and are eager for self-growth, collaboration, and sharing skills and knowledge are most likely to thrive in a cross-sector action research environment. (Labcraft 2014) The think tank groups are local to the Bay Area. The participants possess stakes in the people and the place here, allowing them to more intentionally connect the ecosystem through repeated gatherings. The repetition reinforces trust. This type of engaged art is distinguished by its “Intention to respond with a social call and a relationship with people most implicated.” (Cohen-Cruz 2010, 10) In the case of the YBCA think tanks, the exhibitions are *of* and *by* the fellows group, *for* a broader group of visitors. When the additional layer of visitors engage with the work in the context of the YBCA Public Square, the relay of transmitting, transforming and generating materials continues the network in a more fractured and dispersed nature with additional publics.

The work of Movement Generation as the creative instigator for the Ecology think tank is an example of how the year-long process at YBCA can evolve into an extended engagement with a wider connected group of creative change makers. This grassroots ecological justice organization provided calls and responses in the form of provocations and engagement curriculum focused on humor and hope in relation to some pretty dismal climate change realities. Their work resulted in a

handful of engagements at the Public Square: the *Permaculture for the People* project, an awareness raising comedy set called *Green Collar Comedy* and others. The more enduring part of Movement Generation's presence and leadership are the relationships they've built among a group passionate about ecology. Several of the think tank participants continue to be involved with the ongoing cultural and movement building events through that organization and on their own in the collaborative teams with whom they worked during the YBCA engagements. In social innovation labs, these are called spinoffs. The work and relationships continue beyond the think tank. With the YBCA groups, these relationships signal the potential extended life and networks of change makers formed through the call and response approach.

Shaping the Civic Identity of a Site

Another affective capacity of the call and response approach to public practice is the potential for shaping the civic identity of a site. A civic site is ideally one of community participation, democratic values and social services for the constituents. However, the composition of civic and democratic operations are more complicated, as discussed due to the marginalization of certain publics in a stratified society. In the context of a cultural organization, attention to community and civic engagement can be best positioned to serve the various publics within an environment of inequity by working with the ambiguities and unfixed power structures in order to create new relationships among participating individuals and groups. Along these lines, Thompson suggests:

Long term commitments to physical locations that are able to retain playful ambiguity, contend with power openly inside their communities, and accommodate forms of cultural expression that transgress racial, gendered, sexual and class lines are a sure bet for making the world a better more just home. (Thompson 2015, 146)

Playful ambiguity is something that art centers are well positioned to maintain. As experience spaces art centers host a multitude of cultural engagements from the serious to lighthearted, from the factual to the imaginative etc. YBCA in particular has the potential to maintain this playful ambiguity as a non-collecting contemporary art center presenting film, performance and rotating visual arts exhibitions. Nothing but the building is fixed here, making it a conducive place for experimentation, piloting civic public practices. Thompson refers to these environments of playful ambiguity as “transversal sites of becoming” which he believes “provide a collective framework for people to act on their own experiences, make sense of things, try to reframe the world, and explore new possibilities.” (Thompson 2015, 139) He is speaking of unfixed potentialities both individually and in community. This is precisely what the structure of the YBCA think tanks is designed to act upon and enable. Such unfixed potentialities allow for the passing, transforming and generating of ideas and materials to be potent and inclusive of 30 Fellows from different backgrounds.

To return to Fraser’s ideas complicating processes in an “actual democracy”, I propose that the plurality of publics in the group deliberations of the YBCA think tanks more closely approximate participation in a civic public practice. In pursuing a form of public life, which comes closest to a truly democratic ideal, Fraser asks

“What institutional arrangements will best help *narrow the gap* in participatory parity between dominant and subordinate groups?” (Fraser 1990, 66) Her questions considered in the context of a cooperative social art practice, support the approach in which sites facilitate autonomy and exchange for participants across fields possessing different social, cultural and economic capital. The sites must be available for active participation and sustained engagement. When the YBCA Fellows meet over the course of the year, the monthly meetings facilitate both sustained engagement as well as active participation in partnership with artists and the institution through the call and response process.

To create social spaces friendly to creative desire people need to be able to experience agency and willingness to act as influencer and influenced among transparent power dynamics. (Thompson 2015) This entails a combination of learning and forgetting - or rather, softening one’s beliefs. This too is part of the call and response pedagogy, particularly the space for multiple truths and as well as improvisation allowing one to shape-shift between roles of facilitator, respondent, educator and listener. The components are part of the jazz aesthetic framework put forth earlier by Bridgforth and Jones, and the result is the capacity for transformed beliefs and perceptions. This capacity for changing beliefs and perceptions is crucial in a site that aspires toward an increasingly civic identity and public practice since the capacity for change among individuals paves the way for more collective and cultural changes. This is also how social innovation labs work allowing for the new: “Tension and ambiguity are inherent aspects of working in this fragile context. There’s a craft, an art and a science to creating and evolving spaces in between in

order that the new might emerge.” (Labcraft 2014, 17) That tension and ambiguity require ongoing care among the YBCA Fellows staff to strike a generative balance continually in unfixed environment. In the most functional expressions of this tension and ambiguity, the group dynamics are such that an obvious facilitator disappears and a more collaborative conversation and co-teaching among participants evolves. One in which the agenda remains flexible, emergent and open to the inquiry explored via a call and response pedagogy. This is the reason the YBCA think tank meetings shifted in their latest iteration from a quarterly meeting schedule to a monthly assembly, to allow for this somewhat slower and more collaborative process aligned with a more civic and inclusive practice.

The various iterations of the YBCA think tanks have made clear that the design must maintain an ideal size for cohesion and efficacy and act as a social space for communication. For the YBCA Fellows, that number is about 30 people at a time, a size, which allows everyone to be seen and heard, crucial to the call and response practice. The success of group work hinges on mutual curiosity from people who want to learn from each other. Ultimately, people need to feel comfortable enough to be in conversation and analysis together. The porousness of the group related to invitation impacts commitment and accountability, and as a result has changed shape through various iterations, shifting to a much more consistent and dedicated working group with a stipend. These are some of the building blocks of a civic assembly as applied to the YBCA think tanks. The unfixed power of social capital, which allows for new relationships and possibilities is a structure that YBCA’s think

tanks emulate through rotating facilitation and self-determination of the participants.

From here, the manifestation of a call and response process has the capacity to both disrupt and embrace the collective public imagination and allow for what Thompson calls the “becoming community”: “Collective power can shift via effective organizing models. In some ways, this is where the power of cultural practice can be truly radicalizing – when it works toward the production of self-empowerment in an infrastructure in the midst of transformation.” (Thompson 2015, 125)

Shaping the civic identity and public practice of the YBCA site has begun, indicated by more overtly social justice-oriented programming content as well as the increasingly diverse audience at the center, but will take time. The declaration has been made by current institutional leadership to become a civic place of action, however several more iterations of the YBCA think tanks will be required to arrive at a process, which truly allows artists, community participants and staff to consistently practice the call and response pedagogy and understand the creative yield and relationships, which result from working in this way. Commitment to listening, adapting programming engagements and acting upon the responses of the YBCA Fellows requires working on a shorter lead and tolerating a variety of outcomes. YBCA staff’s capacity for vulnerable receptivity, deep listening, respect for difference and a willingness to be surprised and changed will determine the efficacy of the civic public practice. If the result is prescribed or pre-determined by

the institution, this will be no more than a coercive, cosmetic and potentially exploitative exercise. Therefore, to walk the walk of a civic practice and identity, commitment to the process, in this case, the call and response approach, remains key to moving the dial toward the desires of access, equity, democratic communication patterns and social justice within the fraught conditions of the city at this time.

Little Utopias into the Wider Public Imagination

Walking up the YBCA Grand Lobby stairs, visitors were met by a woman selling mugs at a table. Three video screens featuring twins speaking with each other filled the wall of the gallery landing at the top of the stairs. Also in the space, a stacked pyramid of mugs atop a pedestal. *Can't someone else do it?* was a multi-channel video installation sourced from and produced in collaboration with the sharing economy by Liat Berdugo. The woman selling mugs was hired from TaskRabbit.com, a sharing economy platform whose tagline is "We do chores. You live life." This live *intervention* from paid sharing economy workers served to raise questions around distributed labor, precarious work, and the many roles artists must play in order to have a successful career in our times. By outsourcing the labor of the project she authors, Berdugo created an intervention, thus indicating an engaged performance to be discussed in this section.

How do these micro utopic acts permeate into a wider public imagination? The YBCA Fellows program brings together creative citizens from across the Bay Area to

deploy art and culture as vehicles to instigate community transformation and drive new possibilities in the public imagination. It is a project of utopian callings and idealistic visions. The year-long process of inquiry, dialogue and project generation, aims to experiment in how creative practice can affect change. The resulting live exhibition at the YBCA Public Square is the gauge of potency among the larger public. Here I consider the affective qualities of the Public Square projects in response to questions of the urban future, labor, ecology and freedom as they relate to indicators of efficacy outlined by practitioners of engaged performance. Affective capacities are leveraged by the work's ability to be interventionist and committed to making a change, operating in an educational, social or community context and having some participatory or active engagement with its audience. (Shaughnessy 2015, 21) The Public Square projects collectively contain all of these components – the interventionist (as described in the example above), educational or participatory. Because culture shifts permeating attitudes, norms and policies can take many years, I will restrict my evaluation of the affect of YBCA Public Square projects in relation to engaged performance to those three indicators available in this timeline of proximity within the year between event and research. The actions of the YBCA think tanks may additionally serve as pathways to larger systemic changes in the years to come, however it is too soon in the process for that type of historical and longitudinal analysis.

Mari Ahmed, a journalist and employee of *Mother Jones*, decided to locate her Public Square project, *Dry 5* in the bathrooms adjacent to the YBCA lobby. Her oral

histories of California residents impacted by the drought played as visitors flushed the toilets, washed their hands and drank from the water fountain. The narratives relayed numerous facts of the drought that have been differently restrictive and felt depending on the region Ahmed is highlighting. The stories were personal and also reflected creative responses to the water limits. This project was spatially paired with work by Todd Gilens, another member of the Ecology think tank whose prints and postcards of water source maps from the Hetch Hetchy reservoir juxtaposed a visual component representing water flow with stories of water limits. Both research projects transmitted *educational* bodies of knowledge, another indicator of engaged performance, and also serve to amplify each other in conversation at a site where water is regularly used.

Sitting in the waiting room for the *Joy Clinic*, visitors rummaged through magazines, which were stacked on a coffee table. They watched the TV screen. It felt like the doctor's office. But when Érika Padilla-Morales, with her clipboard called people one at a time into the room for five to seven minutes each, they were met with a series of intake questions, unlike those from a typical doctor. The questions guide visitors to articulate how they want to *feel* in their job and workplace, rather than a focus on what they want to *do*. Instead of asking people to come up with a "dream job" or "passion," Jericha Senyak and Padilla-Morales guided visitors to imagine the character of future workspaces, their bodily sensations, emotional state, coworkers, etc. at a specific future point. Their exchange with visitors guided the creation of an imaginary world of labor where the tasks of the work matter less than how the

actions makes them feel. Following the appointment, Senyak and Padilla-Morales mail visitors their “lab results” so they have a physical reminder of the visioning meditation.

The project emerged from the labor think tank, and took the shape of a *participatory* encounter, another indicator of engaged performance leading to “little utopias”. It was through the think tank process and call and response elements that Senyak and Padilla-Morales met each other and arrived at their project idea following a call for collaborators. The three projects described in this section, *Can't Someone Else Do It? Dry 5* and the *Joy Clinic*, illuminate indicators of engaged performance: the interventionist, educational and participatory. All of the Public Square projects contain at least one of these qualities, highlighting that the yield of the call and response process is one of engaged performance over time.

In his essay “Democratizing Urbanization and the Search for a New Civic Imagination, Teddy Cruz suggests that “Questioning new forms of urban pedagogy is one of the most critical sites for artistic investigation and practice today.” (Thompson 2012, 63) The call and response approach is one such form aspiring to a new civic imagination. Just as the YBCA environment is right for a call and response curatorial approach, the time is right for this form of urban pedagogy, based on the analyses of both Foster and Chang in the introductory section of this paper. Cruz notes that “Engaged art requires looking at the ecological system within which the seed for art making is situated. Looking ecologically becomes a tool of analysis and

understanding.” (Thompson 2012, 195) Ecological underpinnings facilitate broader movements, an aspiration of the YBCA think tanks. These underpinnings are also reflected in the broader programmatic name of which the think tanks are a part, the YBCA Creative Ecosystem. The charge of the YBCA think tanks to affect the public imagination and potentially seed movement on social issues is similar to the aspirations of social innovation labs but distinct in the output of creative practice over direct action: “We could call this movement a swarm, a network, an ecosystem of innovators moving broadly in the same direction.” (Labcraft 2014, 36) By presenting creative projects related to social issues at YBCA, the Public Square the result is also similar to think tank labs: “A level of impact created by labs is the cultivation of new meta-narratives-the stories through which we understand society and detect opportunities for change.” (Labcraft 2014, 113) It is these new meta-narratives within a connected ecosystem that provide the seeds of systemic change. The approach is different, but the ethos is shared with other social change labs: “Beyond solving complex challenges, empowering change agents, and creating new solutions, we’re seeding new ways of seeing the world and creating alternatives. And we’re creating ecosystems that support those new perspectives.” (Labcraft 2014, 37)

As the YBCA Public Square’s outcomes generate little utopias and seed new meta-narratives, the performance is a gesture toward the vision, which those performing wish to manifest. This usually goes beyond what is materially possible in the immediate moment, however, if as Chang and Joseph hypothesize that culture

precedes change, these little utopias and new meta-narratives unleashed into the public imagination by whatever means including the YBCA Public Square, can play a part in warming up the culture for a future of increased equity and social justice. In social innovation labs theory, “All labs are real-life examples of how institutions and civil society can work together in more human, democratic and creative ways.” (Labcraft 2014, 108) The projects, which compose the Public Square are at once both prototypes for trying out new relationships between artists, community participants and YBCA staff as well as experiments in how creative practice can affect change among the broader community of visitors.

So if environment matters most, I propose the call and response methodology employing multi-sensual modes, reflective listening and cross disciplinary creation as a strategy to deploy the art part of the center to choreograph dialogue differently. This approach to public practice is conducive to an institution aspiring toward a civic identity and alternate ways of engaging publics, grappling with the complexity of environmental conditions.. This curatorial practice is specifically designed to navigate the challenges of the times, changing demographics, capital and wealth patterns. The case of the think tank program at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in which the YBCA Fellows explore issues of the urban future, labor, ecology and freedom, illuminates both the methodology and ethos of a call-and-response pedagogy at a site that aspires to a function as host to a range of deliberative and inclusive styles, with an awareness of a stratified society. The case also highlights the challenges and affective capacities of this type of public practice. By articulating

the paradox of institutional desires and conditional realities, I have defined the negotiable operations from which an intervention for curating encounter as a public practice with artists and a dedicated group of community members, facilitates increased equity and access. This practice, in which all actors – the involved artists, community participants and staff facilitators from the institution – transmit, transform and generate material to form a live research process and public exhibition, employs participants in a relationship of partnership with the institution. The resulting live exhibitions driven by a call and response pedagogy in which a variety of knowledge sources are validated in a context of unfixed power dynamics, contributes to a larger conversation about the civic role of an art center, relationship development, shared and emergent process and collective becoming, shaped by site and public practice.

In conclusion, I emphasize that which is distinct about this call and response practice for curating encounter at a site that aspires to emulate functions of a public square—specifically to imagine new styles and idioms for public dialogue encounter that are adequate to a diverse public world. The provocations from living artists and cultivation of soulfulness stemming from inclusion and multi sensory participation, vulnerability and belonging through a jazz aesthetic and somatic social experiences in building relationships are at the heart of this civic public practice. Over time, this call and response approach yields networks of creative change makers, increased civic identity of site and the transmission of alternative and collaboratively generated meta-narratives into the public imagination. The resulting projects and

encounters are the seeds of progress, cultural vitality and community. The organization makes a *call* through this public practice with operations conducive to this time. This is in *response* to the conditions of the moment in the Bay Area as well as at YBCA, with regard to the organization's distinct place in the arts ecosystem, in history and in relation to its founding mandate to civically serve. This is what the people's art center looks like today.

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