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Experiments in Liberation: Contemporary Art, Dialogue and Pedagogy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory and Criticism

by

Bill Kelley, Jr.

Committee in charge:

Professor Grant Kester, Chair

Professor Teddy Cruz

Professor Rubén Ortiz Torres

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Professor Leon Zamosc

2016

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the three women who raised me: mi querida abuela Mama Sarita, mi madre Zoila y mi hermana Giovanna. Mi querida madre, ha esperado este día por muchos años, y en particular quiero dedicar este labor con todo mi cariño. I want to acknowledge Monica's love, patience and support throughout this process. Neither this dissertation, nor this doctorate could have been accomplished without the support of these women in my life.

My primary supporter throughout this dissertation has been, undoubtedly the amazingly supportive Monica Jovanovich-Kelley. I would like to acknowledge my long-time collaborator Maria Fernanda Cartagena for her continued feedback and support over these many years. I would like to recognize the generous funding of Dr. Hector Ziperovich for his philanthropy making much of my research possible. I would like to recognize my dissertation chair Grant Kester as an important mentor in my development as well as the ongoing interlocution of important peers including Sara Daleiden, Allison Danielle Behrstock, David Gutiérrez Castañeda, Suzanne Lacy, and many others I am surely forgetting.

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The case study in chapter 3 has been submitted for publication of the material as it may appear in “Embodied Memory: Reimagining and Legislating Sumak Kawsay in the Modern Andes” in *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good*, eds. Johanna Burton, Shannon Jackson, Dominic Willson. Cambridge: MIT Press (forthcoming). The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

Chapter 4 in part, is a reprint of the material as it appears in “To Teach and To Learn: the MDE11 and Thoughts on Curating Within the Local.” *P.E.A.R. Magazine, Special Issue: Medellin Through a Kaleidoscope 5* (2013): 40-44. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

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“Social Practice in Questions...Pedagogy and an Emerging Epistemology of the South.” *roots&routest: Research on Visual Culture* 3.2 (2013): <http://tinyurl.com/lczwukf>

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Experiments in Liberation: Contemporary Art, Dialogue and Pedagogy

by

Bill Kelley Jr.

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory and Criticism

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Grant Kester, Chair

Contemporary community-based practices in Latin America have a unique lineage and history with dialogically-driven methodologies that were promoted by the Liberation Theology movement within the Catholic Church and the radical pedagogical work of Paulo Freire. That lineage has not been adequately investigated due to the predominance of a post-structuralist-bound post-colonial theory that fails to take these native cultural and social movements into account. As a result, many of the art practices in question have been operating outside of the purview of the art systems and primarily investigated by the social sciences, and not art history or art theory. This dissertation investigates the role of the researcher and curator in supporting these practices and includes three case studies to further the investigation.

Introduction

This dissertation will be concerned with the investigation of contemporary community-based art practices in Latin America and an unwritten history that connects their unique development and methodology to the historic pedagogical work of Catholic theologians and social scientists, under the banner of Liberation Theology. This dissertation is entering uncharted territory. There has been little work done in investigating the intersections between contemporary community-based art making and the important historical events that gave rise to this social movement within the Catholic Church. Thus, the intention of this dissertation will be to set an opening platform for further questions and future research.

Liberation theologies and the numerous pedagogical methods that were aligned with various social sciences have left a memory and a blueprint for a form of community engagement that is ongoing. I will seek to trace these footprints through a few key areas of cultural engagement that I had to learn and experience firsthand. Rather than give an entire overview of how numerous case studies echo these earlier forms of theological work, it is important for me not only to trace where Liberation Theology and other decolonizing efforts come from and what they were trying to accomplish, but also to set the stage for sharing a more complicated inquiry: how someone like myself — a curator and researcher

trained in the United States within the discipline of art history — can interpret these practices. This investigation into my own relationship with these practices is ongoing and it is included here as a point of self-reflexive departure, because, as I will contend, art-world training and knowledge only goes so far in assisting us in this investigation. In a somewhat ironic way, the project of studying decolonization begins with the self-analysis required to ask the hard questions of what types of knowledge we as Western trained intellectuals are privileging and what we are setting aside. This is not only an inquiry in to the content of that knowledge, but also a questioning of the research methodologies of that very inquiry. Thus, there is an interest for this dissertation not only to frame work from a local or regional Latin American perspective but also to help bridge the gap between what might be termed a “north-Atlantic” or “Western” intellectual and pedagogical lineage and cultural practices that carry this decolonizing impulse.

These community-based art practices are currently witnessing a massive growth in popularity not only in the United States but also abroad. My concern in this text is to raise questions that are unique to the Latin American continent while also understanding that the professionalization of these practices, now called Social Practice in the U.S., does not happen in a vacuum. Biennials with a global reach, such as the one I curated in 2011 in Medellín, Colombia, are increasingly involved in assisting contemporary cultural theory to frame how these art practices operate in the world, regardless of whether art theory — or

art, for that matter — is the best tool with which to understand them. Thus, another of my central concerns here will be inquiring about the seemingly inherent segregations and hierarchies that the art world seems to foster and maintain regarding zones of contact between centers and peripheries, between global sources of knowledge, and amongst disciplines — specifically the art discipline. The area of the biennial and of the art circuit as an area of possible research for the construction of contemporary theory around community-based practices will be a latter point of examination, but this text will begin by investigating the development of two important theoretical positions that will help us understand the cultural practices in question. The first will be the historic development of post-colonial theories and their present-day understanding as a branch of post-structural theory; the second will be the birth and articulation of Liberation Theology in Latin America and its need to develop both a dialogical methodology for working within communities and a reliance on the social sciences. This investigation will then be followed by an inquiry into the dialogical practices of Brazilian pedagogical theorist Paolo Freire that attempts to frame his work as part of a larger decolonial struggle in Latin America employing pedagogy and the development of new theoretical models from the perspective of the south.

Awareness of one's investigative frame — an understanding of one's own privilege and historical biases as the all-too-often invisible scaffolding upon which we build our practice — is a central concern within the humanities. Yet one

cannot take this awareness for granted, as the problem of theoretical foundations is often ignored when studying cultures known as residing in the periphery. This is particularly true when one is conducting those studies in the center.

The modern/colonial problematic of Latin American intellectuals and artists studying abroad in Europe, to consider a well-known historical example, was so prevalent — even expected — during the 20th century that it has rarely been questioned. The reasons for this study abroad, of course, were varied. First and foremost there was the fact the 19th- and the early 20th-century educational institutions of higher learning in Latin America were not equipped to nourish the intellectual curiosities of many of the artists seeking to be in dialogue with what was happening artistically around the world. Certainly, this travel back and forth has been well documented through the study of artists such as Joaquín Torres García in his *School of the South* or the Brazilian artists known as the *Antropofagia* generation. Equally investigated have been the various groups of artists/intellectuals the Latin American traveller came in contact with in Europe, the avant-garde teachings that found their way into those travellers' practice, and the digestion and translation of those ideas into a wider Latin American cultural context. This encounter, seen as the backbone of Latin American Modernism, has been discussed many times over and normalized as part of the unquestioned canon in art history. What has not been considered with equal commitment is what was potentially left behind.

The unquestioned position that these artists had to leave is not really positioned as an inquiry into what other pedagogical paths could have been taken. The progress myth — in this case one operating within a pedagogical frame — is the central and fundamental truth of Latin American Modernism that never truly gets considered from a decolonial perspective: what was sacrificed on the altar of modernity's progress? What was left out? What forms of knowledge were simply cited or referenced as being “purely” indigenous or American and then subsumed under the hierarchy of European avant-garde thinking?

This situation is not only an historical one. Today, one could say that the contemporary MFA and curatorial programs taught almost exclusively in the United States and Western Europe are having a profound effect on the exhibition and curatorial programming in the rest of the “developing” world, particularly in Latin America. Yet we rarely question the investigative or theoretical frames being taught at Bard College's curatorial program in New York or the critical studies at Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona in relation to the long and rich history of knowledge formation in the various regions of the Americas. As long as smart young artists or curators find employment within the larger art-world economy, we will not bother to ask if the theoretical and pedagogical lineage is appropriate or even helpful in understanding — much less supporting — the heterogeneity of cultural practices historically present in Latin America.

The cultural practices I speak of — dialogically-driven community based art — often include and prioritize occluded knowledge existing outside academic studies. Given the diversity of communities and histories, can we ask if the standard academic art curricula in Latin American studies has attempted an intercultural dialogue between various traditions and cultures analogous to the cognitive justice sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos cites when he calls for an expanded “ecology of knowledge”?¹ For example, can the current art discourse, as professionalized as it is, be truly open to learning from, and dialoguing with, other areas of knowledge production, such as indigenous knowledge, for example? Given this problem, Sousa Santos reminds us that we are compelled to ask strong and often uncomfortable questions:

However, the discrepancy between the strength of the questions and the weakness of the answers seems to be common. It derives from the current variety of contact zones involving cultures, religions, economies, social and political systems, and different ways of life, as a result of what we ordinarily call globalization. The power asymmetries in these contact zones are as large today, if not larger, as in the colonial period, and they are more numerous and widespread. The contact experience is always an experience of limits and borders. In today’s conditions, it is the contact experience that gives rise to the discrepancy between strong questions and weak answers.²

To what does this asymmetry of power between contact zones refer? To speak of interculturality is to speak of a horizontal multi-lingual communication, of

¹ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “A Non-Occidental West?: Learned Ignorance and Ecology of Knowledge,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (2009): 103–25, doi:10.1177/0263276409348079.

² Ibid.

symmetrical zones of contact, not of majority/minority dynamics. This is to say that an expanded ecology of knowledge is only possible when we were are forced to acknowledge not only the invisibility of certain questions/knowledge/practices of the *other*, but to acknowledge the other's ecology of knowledge as an equal site for exchange and learning. Only then do we get beyond the self-fulfilling prophecy of asking questions and seeking answers already prearranged for us by cognitive and pedagogical status-quos – our pre-established investigative frame. Within this call for an expansion of ecologies is Sousa Santos' reminder that it is within the West's best interest to do so: to enrich an *impoverished ecology* that we have inherited and continue to perpetuate by ignoring other ecologies or contact zones.³

This effort to democratize the processes by which we participate in a more democratic system is coterminously being developed within other disciplines. The Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef argues that our current neo-liberal economic model is often taught and presented as the only alternative within the discipline of economics, a view now supported almost entirely by Western universities and academics. Neo-liberalism, he argues, fails to take “meaningful human scale indicators” into account.⁴ Max-Neef argues that conventionally educated economists who study poverty do so with the abstracted critical distance of “scientific” macro-economic indicators (i.e. the Gross National

³ Ibid.

⁴ Manfred A. Max-Neef, *From the Outside Looking in: Experiences in “Barefoot Economics”* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 49.

Product [GNP]), thus never truly understanding what poverty is, how it affects people, or what local communities can do to improve their lives. In other words, if you address problems through the frame of abstracted academic learning, you will only get abstracted academic answers. Max-Neef argues for a “barefoot economics” that would study issues such as poverty through learned community experience and would democratize the indicators of development to include local ancestral knowledge and the impact on nature in any cost-benefit analysis.⁵ In other words, this kind of transdisciplinary pedagogical process — something approximating a “praxis” — assumes direct and participatory democracy to create bottom-up alternatives to existing paternalistic models. It also requires an intercultural dialogue between histories and cultures that does not privilege the capitalist/scientific goals of trans-northern Atlantic colonial modernity.

The Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel paints an instructive image of this struggle within European modernity.⁶ Keep in mind it is modernity, not modernism, and for Dussel modernity begins with Euro-American contact. He begins by drawing a picture of a flashlight, turned on and illuminating a disc of light on the floor beneath it. This flashlight is a Western understanding of modernity. The flashlight of modernity has illuminated what it needed to see and prosper — information *obliging* its necessities. Certain forms of knowledge,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Enrique Dussel, “Filosofía Política en América Latina Hoy” (seminar presented as part of the *Pensar-actuar decolonial desde el Sur: Andares, avances, desafíos* conference at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, Ecuador, July 12-15, 2010).

histories, and communities are included in this illumination. What Dussel is interested in is the exteriority, the occluded other that is outside this illuminated disc. His decolonizing perspective seeks out this seemingly *discomforting* knowledge. To begin to consider this darkened pool of histories, peoples, and ideas is to act inter-culturally — to enrich our own pool and expand the ecology of knowledge.

This dissertation is not directly attempting to ask these larger questions of economic or epistemological and cognitive justice. They are being introduced here as a point of departure and return, and to frame the problem of intellectual privilege that is front and center in my own thinking given my academic and intellectual development in the United States. My hope is to act and think as *centrifugally* as possible — pushing away from the geographic and cognitive center and finding a balance somewhere between here (the center) and there (the periphery). I will take this approach in this dissertation in part by considering some case studies I have been involved in developing but mainly focusing on a series of histories and ideas that I propose are key in defining the emerging professionalized field of dialogically-centered art practices in Latin America. I will be using the term “Social Practice” not only as a proper noun to denote the name given to a broad set of art practices, but as an adverb to describe and label a broad set of artistic methodologies that are quickly becoming professionalized, studied, and codified. I am aware of the wide net the term casts over very specific forms of practice and communities, often in contexts very different from

my own, and it runs the risk of being a disciplining/homogenizing force. To be more precise, I will often refer to practices that have a more “collaborative” element or those based on creating speech situations as “dialogical,” a reference to the practices highlighted by Grant Kester, who has framed the term within this tradition of work but has also theorized that any analysis of the methodology is, in fact, an analysis of aesthetics and the public’s relationship to art.⁷

This problem in definitions and terms cannot be easily escaped. Although the kinds of art practices I am investigating have a long tradition throughout Latin America, the discipline is yet to be fully formed or articulated, and the practices may never be truly understood within an art context given the inherently experimental nature of the work and the fact that “art” has not always been as reliable a discursive interlocutor as the social sciences. There are three ways to consider this naming issue: first, I am interested in taking stock of a moment in time when the still-fluid concept of Social Practice is being discussed and analyzed at various institutional levels on a global scale. The introduction of these practices within a larger institutional framework in the art world, which I contend is not ready to host them, will be challenging. Analyzing those challenges at this point in the process is, therefore, one reason for “centering” the points of reference for key terms within the field.

⁷ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 81.

The second reason for taking on definitions is alluded to above. The framing of a cultural field of study outside your own geography has challenges, particularly at this early point when a new field is being developed. On one hand, I am concerned that the curatorial projects I have undertaken in Latin America within the field of Social Practice should not be coercive or theoretically misaligned with what is actually happening in those regions. The difference between naming and being named is a colonial situation, and I do not want to replicate the power dynamics I will be critiquing within these pages. On the other hand, my current role as a curator, teacher, and mentor in the field continually requires me to assess my leadership position with regard to the pedagogical structures I create, so in defining key issues I hope both to create a more sustainable field and to be more prepared to dialogue with and support other voices that have a stake in defining a future field for themselves.

The third, final, and perhaps most important reason for examining these key issues at this moment is to reinforce and create a sustainable discourse around the numerous decolonizing interests found within community-based practices in Latin America. Decolonizing efforts, both within the humanities and without, are the roots to expanding our “ecology of knowledge” and are integral, both as an investigation of the practice, but also of the disciplines we collectively depend on for guidance. One of the more interesting fields of research in the region deals with epistemological studies from the conceptual territory of “the South” or “desde el sur.” Thinkers such as Aníbal Quijano and Boaventura de

Sousa Santos as well as research groups such as La Red de Conceptualismos del Sur have argued that this shift in perspective not only implies an inversion of the hemispheric map as a gesture, but that it should be treated, in fact, as a roadmap for research and labor. Decolonizing efforts within the humanities date back to Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), and possibly earlier, but there has been an important level of recent writing, curating, and organizational building in this area of study that is finding its way through various disciplines and legislative processes.

Several examples of the work I have been engaged in or have been researching can be said to fall within this category, so there is an interest on my part not only to frame work from a local or regional Latin American perspective, as mentioned above, but also to help bridge the gap between what might be termed a “north-Atlantic” or “Western” intellectual and pedagogical lineage and cultural practices that carry this decolonizing impulse. *What knowledge can be shared across geographic and disciplinary boundaries? How can we in the global cultural centers define this emerging field of Social Practice in ways that are intercultural? How will we investigate cultural practices in Latin America from within the field of art, when those practices have had little interlocution with the present-day art world? Can we create meaningful sites of learning and exchange between these practices and the art world at large?* The global centers of culture, the academy, and the art world have just recently become aware of the richness of community-based practices in the Latin American region. The

methodologies found within dialogical and community-based art in Latin America begin to address this question in ways that are unique to the region (liberation pedagogy) but that also speak to more universal concerns (community-driven decision making). In doing so, they will raise questions that apply to us all while using the specificity of their place to raise others that are perhaps not as perceptible to us here and help us consider how this emerging field — surely to be international in its interests — will be framed in the future.

Chapter 1, *The languages of colonialism and art: Post-colonialities and Aesthetics*, begins to ask questions regarding colonialism and decolonialism. For example, what concerns does a community-based decolonial practice have with regard to its own methodology? Can one be decolonial within a discipline? The chapter will then define the broad set of concerns and historical events that gave rise to post-colonial theory. The nationalist movements in southeast Asia and north Africa were of central concern to European intellectuals, as Cuba would become to Latin Americans. The rise of a third bloc of power, the non-aligned “third world,” and the efforts to address the post-national liberation movements set the stage for the first wave of post-colonial discourses and organizations through nationalism struggle.

As these nationalist struggles coincided with the ethical demise of the Soviet Union, we began to see a concerted effort by the Left to distance themselves from the reported atrocities brought about by “misguided” collective

action through the development of post-structural theory. But the distrust of community action is not born with post-structuralism; it is in fact part of a larger interest within aesthetic theory and the principles of autonomy in art. If autonomy, one of the central characteristics found within aesthetic theory, is being challenged by community-based practice, then an understanding of this period of transition towards more social engagement in art requires a reevaluation of aesthetics and the theoretical impasses and implications present in collaborative art. The question of autonomy, central to the work of Emmanuel Kant and other Enlightenment-era thinkers, implicates not only the art object, but its reception as well. What of the self and this historic distrust of theories seeking to enact community action? Can the self develop alongside a “politically coherent community”⁸ ?

Finally, reevaluations of the aesthetic paradigm and autonomy bring us to further consider their contemporary incarnations by considering larger theoretical movements like post-structuralism and its academic offspring, post-colonialism. The aforementioned demise of nationalist social movements in the eyes of the Left, spurred by the perceived failures of May '68, brought a new set of concerns more closely aligned with academic readings of liberation — mainly what Grant Kester calls a “textual paradigm” of linguistic critique and a distrust of

⁸ Ibid., 150.

collective action.⁹ From this framework develops a second coming of post-colonial thinking aligned with these same concerns. I will argue for a reevaluation of the use of post-colonial theory in framing dialogical practices in Latin America. Apart from its inception as literary criticism, post-colonial theory's ineffectiveness stems from an inherent distrust of political or community organizing that I argue could be read as a Euro-centric position, and a fixated focus on the poetic reading of liminality, hybridity, and other "third spaces" not suited to understanding this kind of work, nor the context of Latin America. Given the current political, financial, and environmental crises underway in much of the global south, I join others in calling for a reevaluation of our current theoretical positions and conclude Chapter 1 by introducing Paulo Friere's notion of "praxis" and how it addresses a form of dialogical practice and research that can help address the issues of liberation pedagogy more effectively. Freire's praxis will be investigated more fully in a subsequent chapter.

Chapter 2, *Faith, Politics and the Social Sciences: Liberation*

theology and the social praxis, will investigate the historic and contemporary ties between Christian-based community organizing practices and larger pedagogical efforts in Latin America in order to begin to analyze how these methodologies are being resituated within contemporary dialogical art practices. The place to begin will be with a brief history of Liberation Theology and the

⁹ Grant Kester, "Lessons in Futility: Francis Alÿs and the Legacy of May '68," *Third Text* 23, no. 4 (July 2009): 407–20, doi:10.1080/09528820903007693.

developments in Rome leading up to its implementation in Latin America. Liberation Theology marked an important shift in the way that theological and philosophical positions were being articulated and prioritized within the church. The Vatican II Council in Rome (1962-65) held one of several important theological debates that attempted to bring the church into modernity by taking on social issues and inequality in the developing world. But Liberation Theology was not born of permission granted by the Roman curia; it reflected a larger set of social concerns by politicized clergy in various cities within the American hemisphere and depended on a massive infrastructure-building effort that looked to lay communities and social scientists to establish and widen its political and theological positions. The work of base community organizers, working most often with the Catholic church, led to a radical political and faith-based methodology of collective action. The pedagogical work of Paulo Freire, based heavily on these liberatory principles, would later be adopted as a working method by factions promoting Liberation Theology during the 1968 Second Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM 2), an important historical meeting of Catholic Church officials that defined Liberation Theology for generations.

In his foundational text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968 and translated into English in 1970, Freire unambiguously frames his horizontal and dialogue-based principles of learning and engagement within a larger emancipatory effort that found itself being enacted globally. Terms like “consciousness raising” within feminism imply a community-based dialogue and

political criticality that lie squarely on the shoulders of Freire and others within the emancipatory pedagogical movement.

Chapter 3, *The communicative “praxis” and dialogical exchange in education*, will investigate the use of pedagogical strategies within dialogical situations. While much important research is currently being undertaken regarding dialogue and communication within a Social Practice framework of art, those methodologies are still not readily understood as being historically tied to a larger de-colonial struggle in Latin America. The role dialogical models play in culture and community building during this period foregrounded by liberatory and emancipatory efforts in Latin America, requires much historical and theoretical research. Freire’s use of dialogue and subject/object recognition in the process of *conscientização*, or consciousness raising, a complex set of principles used in his pedagogical method, is a fundamental contribution within this movement. His methods arise out of a specific political context and are tied to the same emancipatory principles that bind him inexorably to Liberation Theology in Latin America. This chapter will trace the development of his pedagogical theory within the context of Brazil and other sites in Latin America where popular social movements and popular education were considered one and the same effort.

This chapter will continue by comparing the dialogue-based theories of Freire and German theorist Jürgen Habermas’ framing of “communicative action” as a critical engagement within the shared public sphere. Habermas never truly

focused on education issues, but the relationship between both men had on liberation pedagogy and community building through dialogue makes a brief analytical comparison important. Furthermore, Habermas' framing of "ideal speech situations" is instrumental in understanding many civic reimagining processes found within dialogical art practices. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a reading of Boaventura de Sousa Santos' critique of Habermas and the universalism of Critical Theory and ideal speech.

Chapters three, four and the Conclusion will each conclude with one of three separate art-making case studies that highlight and situate the principles and methodologies framed within this dissertation. These case studies are also projects that I have been involved with, in varying degrees, in my role as curator and researcher. Chapter three will conclude by examining the work of artist Pablo Sanaguano and his series of community collaborations called *Los Hieleros del Chimborazo* (Ice Merchants of Chimborazo) with indigenous communities in Ecuador. The project had many facets, but we will investigate a series of memory-recuperation walking projects with remote Kichwa communities in La Moya, some three hours by car and two hours by horse from Riobamba. This case study will investigate the relationship between his work and indigenous concepts of reciprocity called Sumak Kawsay that have found themselves implemented within the 2008 Ecuadorean Constitution.

Sanaguano's projects, framed through his own ecclesiastical studies in the Catholic Church, aim to create a space, using historical modeling/performance, dialogue and traditional forms of art making to build community consciousness and identity through a recuperation of their cosmological and historic ties to nature. This practice of dialogical learning is also a distinctly political act of community organizing in the face of extractivist economic interests in the region.

Chapter 4, *Curating Social Practice: An exercise in conflicting methodologies*, will investigate the challenges and conflicts inherent in curating and working institutionally with dialogically-based art practices. More specifically, it will focus on the challenges inherent in each practice — curation and dialogically-based art practices — separately and consider ways in which the curator him/herself can collaborate with art practices operating in ways that are very distinct from the logic of curating. This curatorial logic is inherently tied to the historic aesthetic paradigm that promotes the singular contemplative moment with an object of art. This dynamic of autonomy, expected of the viewer as much as of the object of contemplation, is at the heart of curatorial work and makes its encounter with collaborative and politically embedded art methodologies difficult to imagine. I will argue for a re-conceptualizing curatorial work within certain institutional and situational parameters that allow for them.

One particular example of this attempt to reconcile dialogically- or community-based practices within the structure of the art world has been through

the biennial platform. This chapter will investigate the historical mis/connections around Medellín in 1968 as the site of the first Medellín art biennial, named the Coltejer Biennial after its central sponsor, as well as the site for CELAM 2. The final section to this chapter will analyze how the 2011 Encuentro Internacional de Medellín (MDE11) was framed using the work of Freire as a conceptual starting point and how it became a curatorial testing ground for the participatory research operating in Medellín and subsequently within the MDE11.

The series of early Medellín biennials attempted to bring the very best of contemporary art to the city, and were later investigated by the 2007 Encuentro with the idea that it was a relaunch, continuation and an examination of the earlier predecessors. CELAM2 was heavily influenced by the emancipatory and pedagogical theories of Freire. The two events had no relationship but the pedagogical underpinnings to both events found me, as a curator, converging the two at the MDE11, over 40 years after this missed encounter.

This chapter will begin by tracing both the cultural and political context of Medellín, its art scene in 1968 and the violence that plagued the city for decades. Chapter four will conclude with a second case study. *La Piel de la Memoria* (The Skin of Memory) project was a project by U.S. artist Suzanne Lacy and Colombian sociologist Pilar Riano. *La Piel de la Memoria* was initially formed in 1999 and revisited in 2011 for the MDE11. It brought together several key humanitarian organizations, community leaders and youth to create a mobile

museum of memory in response to the violence in the Medellín neighborhood of Barrio Antioquia. After 12 years, the 2011 version, entitled *The Skin of Memory Revisited*, brought the youth involved, now adults, together to discuss the memory of the project and the processes of social reconstruction that are still in development in the neighborhood. We will trace how some of the dialogical methodologies that were used echo previous theological models of pedagogical work and collaboration.

Conclusion. The foundation of this dissertation, as noted above, is rooted in the desire to support future research in an area that has yet to receive much scholarly attention within the United States. It is also important for a future generation of scholars to come from the discipline of art and art history in order to better understand and theorize these practices as “art.” As such, this dissertation is a first step in that direction, not the definitive conclusion. There will be several questions purposely posed but left un-answered and some problem areas that were not addressed. Nevertheless, within the Conclusion of this dissertation there is an intention of recapping what is the state of the field at this moment and point to possible ways forward, in terms of the role of the researcher as well as that of the educator and cultural advocate.

The third and final case study in this chapter will include Tijuana-based collective bulbo’s projects entitled *Colaboración* and *Tijuaneados Anónimos*. Although they hold separate names, these projects should be framed as a

continual line of research investigating the issue of narco-violence in their city during a particularly violent period in 2008. The issue of alternative pedagogical spaces will be addressed via an investigation of bulbo's platforms, developed for bringing together victims, advocacy groups, journalists covering the drug violence, as well as the opening of a community space, based on Alcoholics Anonymous' 12-step program called *Tijuaneados Anónimos* for victims to share their stories. In accordance with AA principles, often associated with Christianity,¹⁰ the individual begins to depend on the group's support through the sharing of stories and grief, thus building community cohesion.

¹⁰ Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as an organization was born in post-prohibition U.S. (1935) and was based on the work of an earlier Christian fellowship called the Oxford Group. AA adopted many of the group's spiritual practices and ideas in developing its steps towards recovery.

Chapter 1

The languages of colonialism and art: Post-colonialities and Aesthetics

"The most pressing research agendas for critics and theorists can arise only out of the situations which they in fact live."

-Aijaz Ahmad ¹¹

The cultural studies dealing with decolonial research from the conceptual territory of “the South” or from a southern perspective have garnered much attention of late. Thinkers such as theologian Enrique Dussel or sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui have argued that this Torres-Garcian inversion of the hemispheric map is in fact, a roadmap for research. As noted earlier, decolonizing efforts within the humanities date back to the early colonial period of Franciscan friar De las Casas. But there is a level of recent activity in this arena that is finding its way through various forms of cultural actions, a level that is unique to this time when a pink tide of left-leaning political leaders and a wave of collective practices that developed after the financial crisis of the early 2000s has changed the tenor and support for collective cultural work.

¹¹ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 2008), 15.

Why would someone involved in art move towards a field of community-based studies that is currently dominated by sociologists, economists, pedagogical labor, and political theorists? Why move away from traditional art criticism and theory currently being conducted within more mainstream Latin American art circuits? These are questions I have been asked on more than a few occasions, and I have come to realize that they are double-edged questions. On the one hand, such questions imply that somehow the field of Latin American art should remain pure to some fixed and easily classifiable notion of regional art production, frozen in time. This side of that double-edge demonstrates a very classic and well-rehearsed case of cultural essentialism, as if Anglo-European art history or contemporary art has not relied on specialists from other fields to understand its own artistic production (for example, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory). The other side of these double-edged questions also implies that somehow these types of practices — dialogically and collaborative-based art practices — should be studied from within the confines of the mainstream art theoretical structure currently operating in Latin America.

As a researcher in an emerging field of study, my position has been that I should attempt to follow the art practice and its methodologies as closely as possible, wherever they may lead me, both in my curatorial and theoretical work. What this means is there are two specific considerations to keep in mind when positioning these practices as "art" within a Latin American context. The first is

that most of the artists that fall within the dialogical and collaborative parameters of my research have had limited interlocution with the mainstream art world. There are a few reasons for that lack of dialogue, some that I cover within the pages of this dissertation. What is important here is to understand that these practices often function in a cross- or *extra-disciplinary* manner¹² and that the art discourse presently operating in Latin America has tended to view these practices with the same incredulity and skepticism as the rest of mainstream contemporary art criticism operating around the globe. Given the dearth of appropriate art theoretical models currently in circulation, particularly in Latin America, coupled with the fact that artists are currently working adjacently within other fields, why force a dialogue that is not presently there? What seems more fruitful is to follow the path the practice leads you through and frame the work appropriately, regardless of discipline. For example, a project that deals with memory recuperation amongst indigenous communities in remote regions of the Andes will require knowledge of a history of pedagogy, art, politics, and faith that is quite different from the one that we are normally accustomed to in the U.S. Likewise, it would be safe to assume that those cultural practices would require different forms of artistic and theoretical interlocution than what the art world can presently provide.

¹² I borrow this phrase from Stephen Wright who defines a sort of practice that operates outside of disciplinary knowledge and as such, begins to question the discipline of art. See Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013).

This is an important moment for the field of Social Practice. If it can expand its field of knowledge and its field of references, and globally consider its appropriate theoretical lineage to foster new arenas of action and interlocution, then it may begin to approximate the promise Sousa Santos speaks of, expanding and enriching our “ecology of knowledge” by moving in and out of our disciplines of research. This move into what he calls other “contact zones”¹³ speaks to the importance of questioning the pedagogical paradigms we have inherited and begins to ask: what and who has been left out? What kinds of knowledge have we set aside or have been set aside in our name? Can we imagine a cognitive and methodological history from various points in the Global South? Can we begin to look at sources, cultures, and histories outside of our own traditions? If it is true, as Sousa Santos points out, that there can be no global social justice without global cognitive justice, then we must begin that pedagogical inquiry to assess if the practices we study are truly spaces where new “contact zones” are fostered. What discursive relationship does this process of decolonization have to earlier post-colonial efforts?

The opening quote included above by the anti-colonial theorist Aijaz Ahmad points to a central concern with regard to working and researching within “situations” that are lived. His concern applies directly to the kinds of art practices examined within this dissertation. It is a concern with lived experiences rooted in

¹³ de Sousa Santos, “A Non-Occidental West?,” 109.

a larger pedagogical impulse to communicate with people in a manner that respects lived knowledge and experience and finds local solutions to local problems through direct exchange. This dialogical element of critical knowledge through lived experience is part of a larger pedagogical effort equally rooted around the notions of access to education, art, knowledge, and subjectivity as much as it is a reaction to the mechanisms that act as barriers to that access.

The mid-20th-century decolonizing pedagogical and ecclesiastical movement known as Liberation Theology was an experiential identification with the poor and a framing of faith and the church to the lived experiences of local communities. The act of moving church teachings from the abstractions of doctrine and philosophy down to the level of community-based interpretations and intersubjective readings of biblical scripture that challenged the injustices of their condition meant that the Liberation Theology must be read within a larger matrix of liberatory political and pedagogical movements of the period. As unique a contribution as Liberation Theology was — and continues to be, to Latin American left-wing political and social struggles — its antecedents are varied and they have historical trajectories in the Americas as well as other parts of the world. The following section traces the history of post-colonial discourses. I do not intend to conflate all colonial struggles, as Latin America was dealing with colonialism and asserting a post-colonial national identity before many European nations were even nations. This 500-year struggle is not only of vast duration, but

is equally difficult to frame. Eduardo Galeno's seminal text *The Open Veins of America* (1973) makes the argument that the colonial struggle to move beyond exploitation has remained intact without interruption for that duration of time, crossing over between colonial and post-colonial rule. It is not this text's intentions to cover that history, but to discuss how certain post-colonial discourses were first established and how they might, or might not, be helpful in understanding certain forms of decolonial cultural practices occurring in Latin America.

As mentioned above, decolonial history within the Americas is most often traced back to Bartolome de las Casas during the early years of the colonial period. In his landmark book *Imagined Communities* (2006), historian Benedict Anderson traces another trajectory that also has ties to this colonial history of the Americas. Anderson maps not only the birth of nationalism to the New World — opposing the commonly held belief that it began in Europe — he also assigns its development to the era of American revolutionary activity. Beginning with the United States' Revolutionary War in 1776, the Haitian Rebellion led by Toussaint l'Ouverture of 1791-1804, and Simon de Bolivar's chain of liberation struggles that closely followed (1817-1829), nationalism has "emancipation" within its DNA. Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined political community that is imagined

as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁴ Imagining its limitation is indicative of a recognition of the nation's boundaries and our collective need to see these divisions amongst cultures. As for the notion of national sovereignty, “the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm . . . nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so.”¹⁵ Other historians have identified the early Soviet party organizing mechanisms — the various international congresses as a central site for tracing the anti-colonial and anti-imperial discourses. Although they were not nationalistic per se, the Marxist frame of emancipation and struggle eventually took on the role and space of nationalism as a very large number of sovereign states emerged in Asia and Africa in the decades after the Second World War. These post-colonial nations emerged under the control of their respective elites and their ties to capital markets. Ahmad argues that the proceeding decades of the 60s and 70s were marked by wars of national liberation which were socialist in their trajectory despite their capitalist economic development, mainly due to their colonial history.¹⁶

During this post-war period, colonies like India, Burma, Ghana, Tunisia, and Libya were able to effectively pressure a weakened western Europe, then demand and subsequently achieve independence, while other nations to-be such

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 7.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 30.

as Kenya, Vietnam, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, and South Africa had to resort, often for sustained periods of time, to armed liberation wars.¹⁷ It is under these conditions of liberatory struggle that the converging power of Socialist tendencies and discourses grew to form a nationalism tied to the theory of decolonialism and imperial critique.

The strongest indication of this movement was exemplified in the historic meeting of newly independent nations in Indonesia called the Bandung conference of 1955 and the Non-Aligned movement that resulted thereafter (1961). The conference gained great symbolic power as the first postcolonial international conference. The twenty-nine countries that participated at the Bandung Conference represented a population of 1.5 billion people.¹⁸ The conference was organized by Indonesia, Burma, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and India and was coordinated by Ruslan Abdulgani, secretary-general of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The conference's stated aims were to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose colonialism or neocolonialism by either the United States or the Soviet Union within their Cold War struggle, or by any other imperialistic nation. Part of a ten-point declaration included the provision of non-involvement in power blocs. This non-

¹⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 162.

¹⁸ Chamara Sumanapala, "The Asian-African Conference at Bandung in 1955," August 26, 2010, accessed May 2, 2014, <http://suite101.com/article/the-asian-african-conference-at-bandung-in-1955-a279121>.

aligned policy in foreign affairs had widespread support among the members and was an important step toward the crystallization of the Non-Aligned Movement. It was, as Abdel-Malek puts it, “the first blueprint for solidarity between the colonized countries.”¹⁹

The members did not have intentions of creating a regional bloc. Bandung did, however, constitute something akin to a distinct and semi-autonomous political group. As such, it was one of the first public statements in support of an independent and transcontinental set of interlocking interests tying together post-colonial countries and regions. Robert Young defined it this way:

As the formation of a potential new power bloc, of a new 'Third World' perspective on global priorities, political, economic, and cultural, the Bandung conference of 1955 could be said to represent a foundational moment for post colonialism. Bandung in many ways marked the beginning of the production of 'the postcolonial' as an ideological and political position, beyond its historic descriptive reference. Indeed, 'Bandung' and 'postcolonial' sometimes function as almost synonymous terms...²⁰

The group, although not successful in making long-lasting changes to the economic condition of their respective countries, it did sponsor the proposal for a New International Economic Order which was taken up and incorporated by the UN in 1974 as a Declaration and Programme of Action for the Establishment of a

¹⁹ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 191.

²⁰ Ibid.

New Economic Order. The shift towards economic issues and priorities was a recognition of the shift that was taking place from colonial struggles to economic struggles that achieving the former did not preclude the latter. In regard to continued economic imperialism the priority of economic dependency contributed to a “radicalization” of the language in the upcoming Havana Conference of 1966. The conference would be the first time that Latin America — along with the other continents of the global south, Asia and Africa — were brought together. The resulting alliance from Havana, called the Tricontinental, focused on liberation struggles in Vietnam, Dominican Republic, and Palestine, as well as opposition to apartheid and racial segregation, suppression of foreign military bases, and support of the nuclear disarmament option, among other issues. The Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (Organización de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina), abbreviated as OSPAAAL, published a multilingual journal out of Havana called the *Tricontinental* that for many years focused on various “revolutionary” cultural projects including examples in cinema and design.²¹

In February 1974, Chairman Mao Zedong set forth his strategic thinking of the division of the three worlds. He observed, "In my view, the United States and the Soviet Union belong to the first world. The in-between Japan, Europe and

²¹ Manuel Barcia, “‘Locking Horns with the Northern Empire’: Anti-American Imperialism at the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 213.

Canada belong to the second world. The third world is very populous. Except Japan, Asia belongs to the third world. So does the whole of Africa and Latin America".

Deng Xiaoping brought this view before the world in his 1974 speech to the United Nations. From an interview with Mao Zedong and Zambian President Kaunda:

Mao: Who belongs to the First World?

Kaunda: I think it ought to be world of exploiters and imperialists.

Mao: And the Second World?

Kaunda: Those who have become revisionists.

Mao: I hold that the U.S. and the Soviet Union belong to the First World. The middle elements, such as Japan, Europe, Australia and Canada, belong to the Second World. We are the Third World.

Kaunda: I agree with your analysis, Mr. Chairman.²²

This language of "third world" solidarity — originally placed as a non-aligned movement within the superpowers — must be understood within the process of nationalism and post-colonial transfers of power. Those transfers were varied, depending on how those processes took place, whether through

²² Mao Zedong, "On the Question of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds," in *On Diplomacy*, ed. Paul Saba. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1998), accessed July 4, 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/china/mao-3-worlds.htm>.

military insurrections or negotiations. By the mid-1960s, the end result in the case of Asia or Africa, or in the Latin American case with Cuba, was the development of a post-colonial critique and position based on newly developed and independent nation-states. In other words, nationalism itself was seen as the determinate answer to colonialism and imperialism.²³

Aijaz Ahmad's critique of post-colonial distrust of national movements

The failure of socialist states like Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam and others that had to fight and suffered devastating results from liberation wars and/or sanctions along the way was enough for metropolitan leftists to consider these as failed attempts and Socialism as a failed project. The anti-war anti-imperial movement was not one of decolonization and nation building, but one of letting countries define their own process, even after their wars left them with no infrastructure to speak of. Vietnam became not the victor of anti-colonial struggle — first against the French, then the United States — but the example of how socialism was doomed to fail. The Left abandoned or dismissed the discussion of material realities as “vulgar Marxism.”²⁴ By the mid- 1970s, anti-colonial nationalism was no longer the tremendous force that it had been in the preceding decade. The revolutionary movements that sought to replace colonial structures with socialist ones were a defeated discourse. Ahmad pronounces the Iranian

²³ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

revolution and Khomeini's atrocities against the progressive forces as the discursive nail in the coffin for the Left.²⁵

Ahmad's important critique of postcolonial theory is the following: There has been a transition from the 1960s forward that dealt with the debates around migration, colony, empire, nation, post-coloniality, and so on — "first under the insignia of certain varieties of Third-Worldist nationalism and then, more recently and in more obviously poststructuralist ways, against the categories nation and nationalism." He argues that as one studies the field of post-coloniality, the effects of poststructuralism can be seen to have an increasingly important role: extending the centrality of *reading* as the appropriate form of politics.²⁶

According to James Clifford, contemporary theorists' work, especially that by post-colonial theorists, must always travel: "Theory is always written from some 'where', and that 'where' is less a place than itineraries: different, concrete histories of dwelling, immigration, exile, migration."²⁷ The framing of knowledge production as one of journey and travel is one that keeps repeating itself: "The anthropological journey — like all true journeys — entails a continuously recursive movement or drift: at once a departure and a return in which knowledge

²⁵ Ibid., 34.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁷ James Clifford, "Notes on Travel and Theory," in *Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists*, ed. James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar (Santa Cruz: Group for the Critical Study of Colonial Discourse & the Center for Cultural Studies, U.C.S.C., 1989), accessed July 5, 2014, http://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_5/clifford.html.

is always at least double — simultaneously knowledge of something other and self-knowledge, and each but a term in the invention of the other.”²⁸ This journey into knowledge is undoubtedly tied to the physical (as much as intellectual) journey that is required of the anthropologist/intellectual. The sustained presence of the traveling thinker — the returning home is the insinuated presence of the social imaginary of the Western global intellectual — is undoubtedly reaffirmed in post-colonial disciplines as a way to be self-reflexive, not only about their historical complicities, but also their contemporary existence within a globalized discipline. The problematic of the post-colonial intellectual is fraught with tension of both class and ethnicity. Edward Said famously claimed scholars should neither stay home nor travel to the West, but actually work in other post-colonial sites.²⁹

But herein lies the problem of the complex issue of essentialism and the concern for the fixity and limits of definitions imposed on groups or communities. The concern over the problems of essentialism, particularly in a post-colonial region like Latin America where so many forms of "essences" were fabricated, invented, and enforced by the tip of a blade, have generated a form of post-colonial theory that, as several key critics have noted, was deeply rooted in the

²⁸ David Scott, “Locating the Anthropological Subject: Postcolonial Anthropologists in Other Places,” in *Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists*, accessed July 5, 2014, http://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_5/DavidScott.html.

²⁹ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 44.

political ambivalences born of suspicions over the consensus building of much post-structuralist theory.

Another byproduct of the “cultural nationalism” position is that when used in the context of the third world it can easily generate a binary of tradition/modernity that is not only overly totalizing, but does not generate fruitful debates on behalf of indigenous cultures. After all, as has been noted before, decolonial struggles came in all dimensions and configurations and each instance led to an equal number of configurations of power relations and socialist struggle within the post-colonial nation. What is required is a new form of decolonial discourse/struggle that moves away from the post-structural paradigm and considers the context in which it must operate. By framing what he calls a historic form of “decolonial thinking,” Walter Mignolo frames the historic problem in this way:

The thesis is the following: de-colonial thinking emerged in the same foundation of modernity/coloniality, as its counterpoint. And this occurred in the Americas, in Indigenous thinking and in Afro-Caribbean thinking. It later continued in Asia and Africa, not related to the de-colonial thinking of the Americas, but rather as a counterpoint to the re-organization of colonial modernity with the British Empire and French colonialism. A third moment of reformulations occurred in the intersections of the decolonization movements in Asia and Africa, concurrent with the Cold War and the ascending leadership of the United States. From the end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, de-colonial thinking begins to draw its own genealogy. The purpose

here is to contribute to this. In this sense, de-colonial thinking is differentiated from post-colonial theory or post-colonial studies in that the genealogy of these are located in French post-structuralism more than in the dense history of planetary de-colonial thinking.³⁰

The “cultural nationalism” that predominates in early post-colonial theory overly essentializes and singularizes the culture of a nation/region, and sets up situations where those in power — the elites, in this case cultural elites — still make the decisions regarding the representation of cultural and ethical values. And this combination of culture and nationalism is particularly disposed to be opaque and misleading. Unlike the category of the state and its political and procedural makeup or the negotiations and mechanization of laws and institutional political parties, “culture” is particularly removed from this political economy and as a result of this “relative autonomy” is easily prone to be disconnected from its area of concentration and study.³¹ If early post-colonial theory was marked by this frame of the nation and the “cultural nationalism” that supported much of the early theoretical work in post-colonialism, its latter stages were marked by a post-structural position that was equally unconcerned with the international division of labor and the political forces that struggled to improve it. The social/political realm of “culture” faced the same division of decontextualization from political struggles.

³⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the De-Colonial Option: A Manifesto” (paper presented at *Mapping the Decolonial Turn: Post/Trans-Continental Interventions in Philosophy Theory and Critique*, University of California, Berkeley, April 22, 2005).

³¹ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 8.

In her seminal 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak famously makes an early note of this disconnect that intellectual and theoretical work has from the forces of labor and on-the-ground social struggle, when she cites the essay *Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuz*. The conversation between the two figures reflects the position of many post-structuralists with relation to not only issues of political struggle, but to their understanding of "otherness" in particular. She cites Deleuze saying: "There is no more representation; there's nothing but action" – "action of theory and action of practice which relate to each other as relays and form networks." His argument is that production of theory is also a practice, but as Spivak points out, the opposition between abstract pure theory and concrete applied practice is too quick and easy.³² She points out: "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for' as in politics and representation as 're-present' as in art or philosophy." The theoretician does not "speak for" the oppressed group.

These two senses of representation — within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other — are related but irreducibly discontinuous. To cover over the discontinuity with an analogy that is presented as a proof reflects, again a paradoxical subject-privileging. Because the person who speaks and acts is always a multiplicity, no theorizing intellectual,

³² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 275.

or party, or union can represent those who act and struggle. Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to those who act and speak? These immense problems are buried in the difference between the “same words: . . . representation and re-presentation.”³³

Spivak defines the subaltern subject as the “men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban sub proletariat.”³⁴ She famously defines these people as those who lack representation in both senses of the term: representation “as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy.”³⁵ These are two powerful social practices through which the subject is constructed and enters the public sphere. Thus, having been denied access to both forms of re-presentation, the subaltern is occluded both within postcolonial theory and within (Indian) society. In the first instance, the subaltern is silent because she is reduced to an assimilated other within the postcolonial discourse of the first-world intellectuals who seek, in Spivak's terms, “the absurdity of the non representing intellectual” to even attempt to make a space for her to speak.³⁶ The critique arises as the subaltern disappears at the same time as the discourse of post-coloniality becomes “transparent.”³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 283.

³⁵ Ibid., 275.

³⁶ Ibid., 288.

³⁷ Carl G. Herndl and Danny A. Bauer, “Speaking Matters: Liberation Theology, Rhetorical Performance, and Social Action” *College Composition and Communication* 54, no. 4 (2003): 561, accessed July 5, 2014, doi:10.2307/3594185.

This larger distinction and problem of questioning the difference between acting and speaking, which is to say the difference between representative politics (proxy) and re-presentation of those politics in art or theory (tropology), is collapsed. Within the forms of art, more specifically art within communities, and how viewership and participation in art is understood within the act of knowing through art, the issue of reading (interpreting knowledge) versus speaking (learning through action) is explained to us more concretely by Grant Kester in his critique of post-structuralism's "hypervigilance" and "distrust" of any form of collective action or knowledge learned through such practices.³⁸

Poststructuralism here presupposes the privileging of autonomous art making over those practices that want to reimagine and actively generate bonds of political and affective cohesion through art. More concretely, the privileging of the former and the distrust of the latter is reflective of a much older, well-worn position regarding the notion that our "undeveloped" human nature that needs to be "repaired" either through art or the shock of some external experience. We will return to this privileging of *écriture* and the rise and predominance of linguistic analysis in art shortly. But as we'll see, this paradigm of needing to repair first and delay social action to some point in the future is a central and foundational premise in aesthetic theory.

³⁸ Grant Kester, "Lessons in Futility," 407.

Kant, aesthetics and the self

There is a difference between the historic but now universalized notion that one owns consciousness individually and alone and the notion that one begins a “process” of consciousness-building with others. How one goes about understanding these concepts depends on many factors, including one’s educational background and the kinds of cultural forms one has been exposed to, so my intention is not to create an either/or dialectic. What is clear is that our understanding of art today is, and has been, historically impacted by ideals developed centuries ago. The Enlightenment-era thinkers Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, and Friedrich Schiller all abided by the central point that there is a universal "entzweiung" (division, disharmony) that reveals contradiction as the "essence of things." These contradictions in the world, seen in the oppositions of body versus mind or God versus Nature, for example, are there when you are born. It is one’s mission to heal them and progressively move from division and disharmony, hard driven by nature and its forces, towards an organic and harmonious whole.³⁹

Aesthetic theory at the time of its conception was revolutionary, in part due to the fact that most of Europe was still living under some form of monarchy. Thus, the understanding of one's subjectivity was foreign — you cannot be your

³⁹ Michael Moran, “On the Continuing Significance of Hegel’s Aesthetics,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21, no. 3 (1981): 221.

own subject when you are subject to the divine right of the king. The promise of subjectivity and our understanding of public space or even of *public* — which is a collection of free subjects — was the theoretical goal that democracy promised and was to be reinforced by aesthetics. This new form of social cohesion — no longer based on the coercive force of God or King — was to be based on our individual cognitive processes, potentially leading to an acknowledgement of the rationality that is inherent, but latent, in all humans. If, through proper education, we were to be released to our own subjective devices, we could create a bond that bound us together. These processes would achieve their most perfect and purest expression in the aesthetic experience because it keeps our selfish/self-interested selves at arm's length.⁴⁰ In the hands of Hegel (1770-1831), aesthetics replaces the absolutes of an earlier age with another absolute more appropriate to his. Hegel, like Kant before him, required an equally universal theory in order to make the universally encompassing argument around humanity's cognitive abilities, to identify its ability to heal its inherent spiritual lesions and maximize its potential for the future.

His many references to "the Idea" or "the Absolute" are another way to speak of universalizing unspeakables in reference to a "structured unity developing towards self-consciousness." Art is the closest approximation of this

⁴⁰ There are obviously many scholars who have critiqued and analyzed Kant's and Hegel's work in relation to aesthetics theory. For a good synopsis in relationship to contemporary art, see Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

"Absolute" and is man's most expressive practical activity that could lead him to that healing/self-realization he seeks. Art was able to fulfill this promise as it was the ultimate synthesis between nature and the "Spirit" — his designation for the collection of human conscious expression at its highest levels of achievement in art, religion, and philosophy. Art is naturally a medium of self-reflection and the artist, through a mastery of natural materials, is able to represent to himself — to teach himself — cultural transformation and overcome the "alienness of nature" towards his "Spirit's" transformative ends.⁴¹ As Michael Moran explains:

Through artistic activity nature became saturated with human significances, and through this conquest of his raw materials the artist re-experiences himself, his own consciousness, in the finished artifact. Hence through art, according to Hegel, self-consciousness is promoted and the fundamental 'contradiction' between nature and the Spirit is imaginatively resolved.⁴²

For the rest of us, aesthetic experiences are a process by which the viewer slowly learns to reach self-realization. He can overcome his 'natural' inherent flaws by molding the external world, through the domination of nature, in a symbolic sense, by virtue of his inner "Spirit". In Hegel's words:

Man brings himself before himself by *practical* activity, since he has the impulse, in whatever is directly given to him, in what is present to him externally, to produce himself and therein equally recognize himself. This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he now finds

⁴¹ Moran, *On the Continuing Significance*, 220.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 230.

again his own characteristics. Man does this in order, as a free subject, to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself.

⁴³

This process then is ultimately the larger function for art and aesthetic experiences and, as Hegel argues, the progression of human history will equally follow this process of synthesis towards greater and greater self-realization — to represent man to himself. Art and the artist clearly have a unique role in this long process of healing ancient wounds. It goes without saying that neither art nor the aesthetic have yet achieved their goal, nor can one say with any certainty that they are even close. What we do know that is that the process is on-going, to be resolved at some point in the future. The aesthetic paradigm, now centuries old, is still very much in effect, and artists using collaborative and dialogical methodologies that seek other forms of bonding and community building, often outside of this aesthetic paradigm, have to contend with this history at some level.

Aesthetic theory's progressive linearity towards the autonomous and self-realized self is as complicated by today's trans-disciplinary world as by the current reevaluations of the concepts around the autonomous object of art. Finding a space for art projects that "embed" their aesthetic experience within a

⁴³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art; Vol. I*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

larger social process of collaborative work has not been easy. The art world has historically pitted the progressive individual artist against the conformity of community consensus. Scholars have pointed out how this mistrust is deeply rooted within aesthetic theory and its historic prioritization of the “purposelessness” of art — its *autonomy*. This paradigm requires that the self must be unburdened of politics. S/he must, in fact, be autonomous if s/he is to encounter and learn from the aforementioned aesthetic experience. The trans-disciplinary nature with which many contemporary artists work, beginning with artists practicing what we now call "Social Practice," is operating outside the realm of art, in politics and other disciplines, unconcerned with art's autonomy. The Kantian position is that we "encounter" art and must learn from it only when we've reached a level of autonomy, or a level of "disinterestedness" in the object at hand. This understanding of art's autonomy — its distance from the viewer's or society's immediate needs — is one reason that art has historically fostered an isolationist position with regard to the public of its time. Beginning with Goya and his unprecedented critique of the ruling class and its values, the history of Modernism in Europe has exercised this position of distanced critique, from the group of artists and poets known as the Symbolists, who consciously retreated from modernity and its bourgeois, materialistic culture, to more contemporary movements such as the Abstract Expressionists, who refused to engage in the kitsch utilitarianism of media-driven and commodified society. As Kester has correctly pointed out, the aesthetic has been consistently defined, by both artists

and theorists, through its difference from dominant cultural forms.⁴⁴ The role of the artist as the receptacle and interpreter of a still-yet unknowable reality that has been entrusted upon him has its roots in aesthetic theory.

Withdrawal often went hand-in-hand with art's function as the tool to wake viewers from their doldrums and provoke a more thoughtful reflection on the world they inhabit. The shock and rupture of the avant-garde work of art were so central to this process that we often associate them as being inherent qualities to art in general.⁴⁵ From Realism's elevation of poverty and labor to the heights of fine art through Dada's critical and attacking style all the way forward to the contemporary invocation of "antagonism" as a necessary function of art and democracy,⁴⁶ the need to dislocate art from the public was most often based on the belief that the dehumanizing nature of modernization and the instrumentalizing characteristics inherent in capitalism required provocations strong enough to wake the viewer from his stupor and into consciousness. This form of shock therapy was guided by the artist. Duchamp's *Fountain* of 1917, one of the twentieth century's most emblematic and celebrated works of art, is so replete with provocations that we seem to have forgotten that this is part of a larger aesthetic strategy that should be questioned. The modalities of shock and withdrawal are so well known at this point as to be understood not only as a

⁴⁴ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 89.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁶ For an argument for the importance of antagonism in art see Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004): 51–79.

tradition within Modern art, but also to have been normalized as the lingua franca of modern and contemporary art, in general.

Schiller and education

One central figure within aesthetic theory is Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), a dramatist later turned critic and philosopher who in 1794 published *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, in which he lamented the isolated and specialized knowledge of early modern society and the social alienation that came with the violence and emerging capital-democratic revolutions in France. His promise that aesthetic education could not only make man whole but could set us free from our inherent instrumentalizing tendencies is still with us today. Terms he coined, such as the play-drive or the aesthetic impulse, have helped individualize the process of self-awareness and development as a singular act. In Schiller's world — and that of others, like Emmanuel Kant, from whom he borrowed liberally — it is the singular, the individual that through reason must find him/her self, but rational enlightenment was not enough to do/accomplish this. True human development required a bridge between the sensuous and rational nature.⁴⁷ Beauty offered a model of this ideal wholeness that no other form of education could duplicate.

⁴⁷ J. C. Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters Upon The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), Letter XII, accessed July 5, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/schiller-education.asp>.

The transition from the passivity of sensuousness to the activity of thought and of will can be effected only by the intermediary state of aesthetic liberty; and though in itself this state decides nothing respecting our opinions and our sentiments, and therefore leaves our intellectual and moral value entirely problematical, it is, however, the necessary condition without which we should never attain to an opinion or a sentiment. In a word, there is no other way to make a reasonable being out of a sensuous man than by making him first aesthetic.⁴⁸

In Schiller's proposition anything attempted before this aesthetic education has taken full effect is bound to fail. This raises concerns over whether any form of collective political action is conceivable outside those who have achieved this state of elusive aesthetic liberty. When does that moment of “complete” aesthetic education take place?

The notion that art and education, and more specifically aesthetic education, have profoundly embedded links to freedom is still a central argument for art's inherent qualities. It is the reason why museums fancy themselves educational institutions. It is also the reason why art is taken seriously as an area of humanistic study and why, above all else, art is still at its very core, an endeavor in pedagogical study and labor. In Schiller's time, on the heels of the French Revolution, the notion of the self was still in development, and since a “public” can only exist as a collection of autonomous and individual selves, we see that the two ideas were intrinsically tied and are born together from the same

⁴⁸ Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Letter XXIII.

set of emancipatory preoccupations. But Schiller's conditions are not ours. He lived at a time when the self was, for the most part, subject to someone else — a monarchy — and as we have stated, a king's subject cannot be his or her own. Centuries later, subjectivity is framed entirely differently, and collectively we face a different set of problems. One only has to consider the current social, economic, and ecological urgencies, and those yet to come, to realize that we in the cultural field will be required to radically re-think our theoretical game plan with regard to facilitating collective action. Are there sites where art can make a difference in the here and now?

The textual paradigm: Writing and Speaking

Theorist Grant Kester has argued that the continuous lineage of aesthetic and post-structuralist theoretical proposals has often branded collectivist cultural action as naive or unsophisticated. For contemporary critics, socially engaged art that directly facilitates reflection and action with communities towards resolving actual social conditions runs the risk of being "instrumentalized" or simply being reduced to a form of social work, losing its aesthetic qualities and its promise to some other discipline.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For an overall treatment of this concern, see Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

One enduring characteristic of post-structuralist theory has been the inquiry into the inability to study or escape the structures we inhabit and the instability of the subject and his identity.⁵⁰ This project of destabilizing meaning on the part of both the writer (language has multiple meanings) and the reader (his subject position is already unstable) was found in the form of a literary form that was focused on breaking the “assumed” relationship between the signifier (word) and the signified (its meaning). The promise of these exercises is to both destabilize any notion that social cohesion or group identity can be established and to construct a space of “textual play” where meaning is no longer in the hands of the author, but can be created “freely” thereby, modeling the forms of freedom we hope to aspire to in real life. Roland Barthes puts it this way:

The Text, on the other hand, is linked to enjoyment [*jouissance*], to pleasure without separation. Order of the signifier, the Text participates in a social utopia of its own: prior to history, the Text achieves, if not the transparency of social relations, at least the transparency of language relations. It is the space in which no one language has a hold over any other, in which all languages circulate freely.⁵¹

The distrust of consensual meaning — in these terms, linguistic consensus — is transferred to the experience of the reader, who is destabilized in his/her attempt to link signifiers to signified. The reader, now liberated of the contamination of conventional models of signification, is free to create a new set

⁵⁰ Kester, *Lessons in Futility*, 412.

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 80.

of critical parameters for "reading" the text. This was seen, and continues to be exercised as a form of political act, albeit one done "within the text."

Politics at the level of linguistic critique clearly distances itself from politics being done on the streets. As Peter Starr explains, this is an unfortunate theoretical byproduct of a collective post-'68 disillusionment. The "all-or-nothing criterion" of the May '68 revolts created a "specular doubling," based on Lacanian concepts built around the mirror stage, where "revolutionary action is doomed to repetition because revolutionaries invariably construct themselves as mirror images of their rivals."⁵² By somehow failing at the revolt on the streets, we came to the conclusion that true activism could only happen within the text. By doing so, we in the art world have come to accept one form of politics (language) as like any other and have thus formed an ineffectual critical paradigm somewhat of our own making. By arguing that being political within an aesthetic exercise is incompatible with being political within a community, the art world and the theoretical structures that support it have no way to conceive of an art practice that can do both. This linguistic paradigm has, for all intents and purposes, become the lingua franca of art. This inability to reconcile the historic tension between poetics and politics in any meaningful way has limited our critical zone to the realm of only aesthetics, only the poetic, only the linguistic. If we are to take this situation seriously then, at the very least, for the purposes of examining

⁵² Peter Starr, *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May '68*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 2.

what an art practice focused on critical pedagogy and collaboration can do in a community, the efficacy and appropriateness of our theoretical lineage should begin to be questioned.

Starr sites the political movement in Paris in 1968 as having begun a few years earlier, as U.S. warplanes bombed North Vietnam in 1965 and "young French revolutionaries commonly looked to the liberation struggles of the Third World for models of a revolutionism untainted by the blandishments of capitalist society—a phenomenon known as le tiers-mondisme (Third-Worldism)."⁵³ Other movements, such as the dissolution of the French Communist Party's student organization, were key factors in the events within the proceeding student movements. 1965 was also an important year for French intellectual writing, with several key post-structuralist publications including Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Althusser's *For Marx*, and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, among many others.

If this theoretical moment had its beginnings in 1965, then its end was reached in the late 1970s with French intellectual thought's disengagement from Marxist-Leninist political theory. Key historical events were influential in this transition, beginning with the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and ending with a series of events undermining communism, including the publication and

⁵³ Ibid., 3.

translation of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's damning first-hand account of Soviet prison camps in *Gulag Archipelago* (1974), and the French Communist Party (PCF) abandoning the Leninist "dictatorship of the proletariat" line and admitting the peaceful, democratic transition to socialism (1976). Likewise, the third-world post-colonial movement (le tiers-mondisme) suffered several setbacks after news of the Khmer Rouge policies of mass urban evacuations, forced labor camps, and the discovery of killing fields was beginning to emerge; these revelations were particularly damning given Pol Pot's education in Paris and participation in the PCF. Equally forceful was the news of forced evacuations of south Vietnamese "boat people" at the hands of northern communists after the fall of Saigon in 1975, followed by televised images of starving refugees being rescued from home-made boats at sea.⁵⁴

Finally one could include the public and televised declaration by Bernard-Henri Lévy of a "New Philosophers" movement in 1976 and the subsequent publication of his book "Barbarism With a Human Face" (1977), in which he asserts: "no socialism without camps, no classless society without its terrorist truth."⁵⁵ Despite the fact that the "nouveaux philosophes" do not serve as representative of any defined or particular movement, the group's publications and public appearances are said to have been instrumental in making right-wing

⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁵ Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Barbarism with a Human Face* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 111.

conservative groups equate Marxism with terrorism.⁵⁶ “Socialism is totalitarianism,” Levy had said in 1978. “As long as you are a Marxist, you will justify no matter what horror and no matter what evil in the name of historical providence.”⁵⁷

These intellectual currents deeply altered the direction of post-colonial theory, which had its first iteration articulated within the colonial European liberation movements in the post-war era, a model based on “cultural nationalism” and socialist inspired struggles with regard to labor and economic equality. With the rise and development of post-structural thought, it then takes on a renewed life moving towards this later model based on post-structuralist positions seen in the work of Homi Bhabha and the late work of Edward Said.

By the mid 70s, any form of socially committed work with communities was seen with great suspicion by academia and many post-colonial theorists, now deeply entrenched within the intellectual centers of Europe and the United States. Within art departments, this “retreat to the text” can be seen, in many ways, as a reinforcement of already existing paradigms of autonomous art practices and traditional object-making.

⁵⁶ Oskar Negt and Jamie O. Daniel, “Reflections on France’s ‘Nouveaux Philosophes’ and the Crisis of Marxism,” *SubStance* 11, no. 4 (1983): 57.

⁵⁷ Michael C. Moynihan, “The God That Flails: Bernard-Henri Lévy Takes on the Rudderless European Left,” review of *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism*, by Bernard-Henri Lévy, reason.com, January 2009, <http://reason.com/archives/2008/12/17/the-god-that-flails>.

Praxis: a new form of decolonial thinking?

What should a new form of decolonial theory do? How should it operate?

That question is a very current one, so I will propose two key points of debate that any new theoretical and methodological developments should take into account. Hopefully, these two interconnected proposals will also illustrate and guide us in understanding the following chapters. The first proposal is that theoretical developments based on, or guided by, decolonial interests should be carefully and equally tempered by a form of practice operating in the social/public realm.

The second proposal is that theoretical developments based on, or guided by, decolonial interests should maintain their political and emancipatory potential for oppressed groups by maintaining close contact with said groups. These two proposals are interconnected in ways that might seem redundant, but I make the distinction between learning from cultural practitioners (i.e. artists) whom have developed a practice or a mode of operation and learning from the community that is hosting/collaborating with the cultural practitioner. The latter group calls for a unique interlocution with the theorist/researcher that is about learning through the contexts, histories, and local knowledge that the artists are working in. In many ways this form of field research helps lay a foundation. While interlocution

with the former group calls for not only critique of the practice, it also represents a learning opportunity for the theorist in how successful practices can help theory develop and grow, thus improving the interlocution in a cyclical manner.

In 2010, Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef, whom I cited in the preceding chapter, shared a story on television with *Democracy Now!* journalist Amy Goodman on how he developed the concepts around his seminal publication critiquing the field of economics *From the Outside Looking in: Experiences in Barefoot Economics* (1982). The economist was concerned with how the discipline had become a professional exercise in macro visions of the world, more concerned with professional development than connecting and learning from the world it was supposed to be studying. He said the following:

I worked for about ten years in areas of extreme poverty in the Sierras, in the jungle and urban areas of Latin America. And one day at the beginning of that period I found myself in an Indian village in the Sierra in Peru. It was an ugly day. It had been raining all day. And I was standing in the slum. And across from me, a guy was standing in the mud. He was a short guy ... thin, hungry, jobless, five kids, a wife and a grandmother. And I was the fine economist from Berkeley.

As we looked at each other, I suddenly realized that I had nothing coherent to say to that man in those circumstances, that my whole language as an economist was absolutely useless. Should I tell him that he should be happy because the GDP had grown five percent or something? Everything felt absurd. Economists study and analyze poverty in their nice offices, they have all the statistics, they

make all the models and are convinced they know everything. But they don't understand poverty.⁵⁸

In his foundational text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968 and translated into English in 1970, Paulo Freire defines his key term *praxis* — an act that shapes and changes the world — by invoking the singular term "action-reflection." He explains, "Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interconnection that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers."⁵⁹ Freire sees these undertakings as concurrent. To separate the processes of action and reflection is to create a dichotomy that is akin to dichotomizing and separating theory from practice. The reflective component within his dialogically-driven pedagogical methodology is inseparable from action. It gives action its purpose, and the resulting praxis is the key to liberation. Furthermore, it is this ontology of praxis and our ability to achieve it through the cyclical movement from examination of lived experiences, on to theoretical reflection, and back again to lived reevaluation and active application, that leads to self-realization of the political self. Our ability to define and live a praxis, the possibility of our achieving it, is what defines us as human, and as subjects — not objects — in the world, capable of transforming reality.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Chilean Economist Manfred Max-Neef: US Is Becoming an 'Underdeveloping Nation,'" *Democracy Now*, September 22, 2010, http://www.democracynow.org/2010/9/22/chilean_economist_manfred_max_neef_us.

⁵⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), 87.

⁶⁰ Raymond Allen Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres. *Reading Freire and Habermas: Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Social Change*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 34.

It is perhaps for this reason that collaborative community-based research and dialogue have been centrally incorporated as a form of critical pedagogy into what we now call Social Practice. These methods/approaches echo a form of Freirian praxis. The numerous cultural practices in Latin America that have a commitment to work politically, as well as culturally, alongside the communities they collaborate with often have little concern over the intellectual trajectories of post-colonial theory. They understand that the mainstream art world does not always value their work, but they also do not see any benefit in concerning themselves with intellectual histories that do not feed the practice within the community.

The primary concern with post-colonial theory has been that it shares more in common with the concerns of post-structural theory — an inherent suspicion of consensus building and community organizing — than it does with the practices and people on the ground doing the hard work of decolonizing knowledge and power relations. Even within the emerging decolonial discourse, one has to take care not to slide back into a purely rhetorical or purely linguistic exercise that does not take the already-existing field practices into account.

The following chapter will begin to investigate the liturgical and social contexts that gave rise to Liberation Theology, both in the changes in Rome with

Vatican II and the rapid rise of ecclesiastical communities employing experimental pedagogical forms in Latin America. These latter developments were also quickly employed to investigate the vast inequalities that plagued the region continuously through critical research by economists and social scientists as well liturgical shifts towards emancipatory readings of the Bible put forth by liberation theologians. These developments came together in the need for critical analysis of poverty and oppression in the work of Friere and others that gave formation to our current notions of *praxis* and *critical pedagogy*.

Chapter 2

Faith, Politics and the Social Sciences: Liberation theology and the social praxis

To be frightened of new forms in theology is to be frightened of God
- Jon Sobrino ⁶¹

Man is the measure of all things, since God became man.
- Karl Barth ⁶²

“...For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.”

Then they will answer and say, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?”

He will answer them, “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”

- Book of Matthew 25: 42-45

⁶¹ Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), n.p.

⁶² Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960)

This chapter will focus on understanding the cultural and ecclesiastical movement called Liberation Theology. This chapter has a few unique characteristics that should be introduced now in order to facilitate its reading. First, it is a chapter that has little of what one might call “art” theory. It does not focus on art practices and includes no artist case studies. This is partly a condition of historic, uneven theoretical development. There are few, if any, academic sources in Latin America that frame the community-based practices that this dissertation is examining as “art.” As mentioned previously, their central frame of research has historically been the social sciences. This I have come to learn from first hand experience conducting field research in Latin America for over 5 years. A visual anthropologist might acknowledge a practice as art, s/he might even respond to the importance of it functioning in the community as an art practice, but visual anthropology does not carry the mandate to frame it as an art practice. Meaning that generally, the social sciences do not ask researchers to examine a cultural practice with the mandate of framing them within new theoretical perspectives and historical lineages of art theory or art history. This need for an “art” analysis is the most urgent task within the field.

A second issue that defines this chapter is that within the canon of historical accounts and study the majority of reflections about the Liberation Theology movement have been done by the ecclesiastical community who had participated in it. These are passionate accounts and defenses of the movement

by those who lived it. They are an invaluable resource. Yet, it is important to add that priests hold religious perspectives and support positions around organized religion that can be seen as contradictory to critical theory. This requires me to balance out the use of primary sources with a look at secondary sources that offer the kind of structural analysis of the movement required by this dissertation.

A third characteristic of this chapter is that there is an effort made to trace the history of Liberation Theology and the theological arguments made by its framers toward its social goals. That theological labor was crucial as it served in defense of the movement that had garnered much attention and criticism from conservative forces both in Rome and elsewhere. This chapter follows the theological development because the scholar priests were careful to argue for a both theological as well as methodological coherency, where ecclesiastical arguments supported and extended the community-level pedagogical work that was central to their movement. In other words, Liberation Theology adoption of pedagogical, dialogical and community-organizing tactics into their purview of concerns had much to do with their ongoing theological development.

* * *

In *The War of Gods* (1996), Michael Löwy asks a central question: How did Liberation Theology arise in the mid 1960s, given the long-standing historical

relationship the church had with the powerful and the wealthy in Latin America? How was it able to develop at that historical moment?⁶³ Most scholars agree that one of the most important changes to the Catholic Church in the last 200 years has been the Second Vatican Council (known as Vatican II; 1962-65). As Phillip Berryman states: "For centuries church authorities had been piling sandbags higher and higher to withstand the rising waters of modernity. With Vatican II the dam broke."⁶⁴ This metaphor of modernity flowing in and forcibly shaping the church and its positions could not be more apt. The flow might not have been as quick, or as forceful as some within the liberation movement would have liked, but this negotiation between a center bent on preserving its centrality and the periphery bent on framing its own direction represents the well-worn path Church activists had been forced to take over many years in Latin America. This crisis brought about by modernity cuts to the core of what Liberation Theology is fundamentally about. After the Enlightenment, theologians began to frame theology through the lens of human experience. Experience was the essential form of understanding, as it was the place where humans meet others in a fundamentally social space. Theology slowly became a demonstration of the interconnectedness of the human experience and the story of Christianity. Liberation Theology emphasizes beginning with the human experience, learning in innovative ways, reflecting upon and critically considering that experience from

⁶³ Michael Löwy, *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1996), 39.

⁶⁴ Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 16.

its social and political context, as the starting point of Christian evangelization. In other words, the starting point for Christianity was no longer God's word, but the human condition. The turn towards the subject that Kant had begun two centuries earlier was finally being adopted within the Catholic Church.⁶⁵ Human history and subjectivity became the foundations for theology.

To answer Löwy's question — how was this movement possible? — one might begin by stating the positions most often put forward. One well-known argument was that the church was forced to innovate and change. Modernity was at its doorstep and the world was leaving it behind. Unfortunately, that doesn't answer the question about how people of various disciplines were involved with the movement and how it originated. Another argument suggests that the people involved changed the church from the inside and made it reflect their own social realities. The rise of *Comunidades de Base* (Christian Base Communities) is often cited as powerful evidence of this structural change from the ground up. This argument, in turn, does not fully reflect the social conditions of the church and the important theological changes that were happening at the time. The answer to Löwy's question lies somewhere in the middle.

The first part of this chapter has three central areas of concentration that reflect the three central constitutive elements of Liberation Theology. The first is

⁶⁵ Alain Mayama, *Emmanuel Levinas' Conceptual Affinities with Liberation Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 45.

the hermeneutic or theological reading of the Bible and the theological advances that brought about important changes to the church's positions and practices. Ultimately, those theological advancements helped foster new ideas with the faithful in both worlds, New and Old. The second element is a consideration of the socio-political changes that were happening at that time as well as the analysis of those events based in critical social research. An understanding and articulation of the political and economic realities of Latin America and the subsequent solutions that would be foregrounded are equally as important as the theological shifts that were happening within the church. A final element of this analytical structure will be the focus on praxis. From the perspective of Liberation Theology, a pastoral praxis was a central and defining characteristic that would be the vehicle that would not only carry the gospel and its promise of liberation to the masses, but would be the embodiment of the theology itself. In the words of Leonardo and Clodovis Boff: "... Church has the duty to act as agent of liberation. It must attempt to articulate its words, its catechesis, its liturgy, its community action, and its interventions with established authority, in the direction of liberation."⁶⁶ This concentration on praxis and the evangelization of liberation will lead us to consider the intense research that was being conducted by Latin American clergy and researchers in order to understand the hemispheric context. These efforts were made primarily through the work of social scientists, and Liberation Theology owes a great deal of its theological force to their research.

⁶⁶ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), n.p.

This chapter will conclude by introducing the importance of the base community organizations and the seminal 1968 CELAM conference in Medellín, where Liberation Theology and its praxis were formalized for the first time.

The relationship between pastoral studies and the social sciences that will be explored throughout this chapter has created conditions through which community-based art and cultural practices in Latin America are examined. Many contemporary cultural practices in the region that continue the work of critical dialogue and community-building are intrinsically tied, consciously or not, to these earlier efforts. This link is easily proven when one begins to investigate said practices; one finds, as I have, that the central point of interlocution is not the discipline of art, but the social sciences: visual anthropology, economics, and sociology, not to mention the various regionally specific specializations found in sub-disciplines such as *violontología*, or the study of violence on society. It is the social sciences that are the central points of academic contact for the various practices I have encountered in Latin America. As such, these practices are not often referred to as “art,” or their practitioners as “artists.” This framing will inform, in productive ways, the possible relationships open to me as a curator within the art-world structure of an “art biennial,” and will ultimately reinforce this tie to the social sciences and the pedagogical legacy of Liberation Theology within the platform of the 2011 Encuentro Internacional de Medellín (MDE11) that will be explored in Chapter 4.

History of Liberation Theology and the Church in Latin America.

With regard to theological studies, Liberation Theology was influenced heavily by the social teaching of the church commencing with Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), modern European theology, Vatican II (1962-65), and the CELAM conference at Medellín (1968). But this historical and theoretical lineage is still being debated. The debate on the originality of the movement to Latin America often centers on the "conciliar" or "post-conciliar" nature of the liberation thought, meaning its ties to Europe. In other words, those writers and original framers of the movement in Latin America have been careful to say that Liberation Theology is not "conciliar," as it does not stem directly from Vatican II. Others will go further and argue that the movement does not even emerge from Vatican II's aftermath and its teachings — or is not "post-conciliar." This text will not delve into those debates.

Nevertheless, in order to answer the question of how Liberation Theology came to prominence in Latin America, this text will argue that there are historical convergences, asymmetries and affinities that were drawn upon between the church activists in both Latin America and Europe, and that this flow of information was nutritive in both directions. Although the scholarship up till now has been centered one-way, following the traditional direction of beginning in

Europe and being reinterpreted in Latin America, the influence of the movement around the world is undeniable. Evidence for that fact can be found in the Vatican's firm reaction to it during the tenure of Pope John Paul II and his appointment of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, to head the powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – the organization that used to be known as the Inquisition, defenders of Catholic doctrine. The election of John Paul II began a period of prolonged backlash against the progressive movements that were born of Vatican II. Yet both men were careful to claim that they were preserving the true spirit of the council and argued that Vatican II's documents had been misinterpreted, not mistaken.

Vatican II, through the Holy See, formally opened under the pontificate of Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) on 11 October 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1965. 2,600 bishops from all over the world met in Rome during that period. The theme of the council was *aggiornamento*, which literally meant to "bring up to date." The overwhelming focus of Vatican II was the Church's relationship with the modern world. After World War II, with shifting cultural relationships to religion, there was a pressing need to address modernity and church practices. Sixteen documents in total came out of it, laying a foundation for, among other things, Liberation Theology. Among the numerous ancillary publications there were Four Constitutions as the central theological bodies, nine Decrees including Decree on the Pastoral Office

of Bishops in the Church and three Declarations, including Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions and the Declaration on Religious Liberty.⁶⁷ The results, in many cases, were swift. All of a sudden, Catholics could hear the Mass in their local language, and the church opened conversations with other faiths, particularly the Jewish faith. Laypeople could now take leadership roles in the church, as the laity are as much part of the "Pilgrim people of God" as any pope or conclave. The term "reconciliation" is often used to describe the spirit of Vatican II.⁶⁸

Vatican II was the result of a long-brewing series of shifts within the church. It also came on the heels of many equally longstanding questions that were being framed in Latin American circles, both within theological circles and in the social sciences. In Rome, that path could be traced back to the late nineteenth century. Much of what we consider Catholic "social doctrine" or "social Catholicism" began under Pope Leo XIII (1878 - 1903) with the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things, 1891). In this document, the Pope makes critical remarks about the growing inequality and abuses found within his current socio-economic situation. Although he rejects socialism, as he understood it in 1891, and class struggle, he makes the point that the rich should

⁶⁷ "Documents of the II Vatican Council," *The Holy See Archives*, accessed July 2, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council.

⁶⁸ John W. O'Malley, "Vatican II Opened the Church to the World," *New York Times*, October 10, 2012, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/11/opinion/vatican-ii-opened-the-church-to-the-world.html>.

give to the poor — not as an indication of a just social imperative, but as Christian charity. Nevertheless, this concern for “distributive justice” implied a call for equality that the capitalist titans of the period found unacceptable and revolutionary. As Cleary points out, this development stimulated the drive to unionization, shares in benefits and pensions, and improved working conditions. It was particularly influential in the U.S., where as late as the 1950s there were 28 labor institutions with formal ties to Catholic universities.⁶⁹

In 1931, Pope Pius XI wrote *Quadragesimo Anno* (In the 40th Year) on the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, in the midst of the Great Depression. In it, he expands on the right to private property, while simultaneously arguing for its social function to be subordinate to the common good, going so far as defending a state's rights to expropriate private property. Pius further articulated topics first developed in *Rerum Novarum* on capital and labor, the call for fair wages, and the dangers of the growing concentration of wealth. Pius also continues his predecessor's critique of socialism and communism as models based on class conflict that “affirms that human association has been instituted for the sake of material advantage alone.”⁷⁰ Pius' critique of freewheeling capital reads as quite contemporary and it is hard to believe that it came from the Vatican:

⁶⁹ Edward L. Cleary, *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 57.

⁷⁰ “Quadragesimo Anno,” *The Holy See Archives*, paragraph 118, accessed July 2, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html.

The ultimate consequences of the individualist spirit in economic life are those which you yourselves, Venerable Brethren and Beloved Children, see and deplore: Free competition has destroyed itself; economic dictatorship has supplanted the free market; unbridled ambition for power has likewise succeeded greed for gain; all economic life has become tragically hard, inexorable, and cruel. To these are to be added the grave evils that have resulted from an intermingling and shameful confusion of the functions and duties of public authority with those of the economic sphere - such as, one of the worst, the virtual degradation of the majesty of the State, which although it ought to sit on high like a queen and supreme arbitress, free from all partiality and intent upon the one common good and justice, is become a slave, surrendered and delivered to the passions and greed of men. And as to international relations, two different streams have issued from the one fountain-head: On the one hand, economic nationalism or even economic imperialism; on the other, a no less deadly and accursed internationalism of finance or international imperialism whose country is where profit is.⁷¹ (109)

In these words, and in other sections of the *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI begins to lay out what will be a watershed development: the notion that sin was collectivized and institutional. The concept of structural sin is born out of the argument for the unity of history. In medieval and Reformation theology, there was a distinct division between the natural and supernatural worlds, the kingdom of God and that of Man. To move from a church with its place in another world, to one looking towards this world — to bring the church and its concerns down to earth, so to speak — was a fundamental shift made possible by Vatican II. Currently, official church teaching has come to acknowledge the social and

⁷¹ Ibid., paragraph 109.

structural dimensions of sin. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004), in paragraph 119, describes social sin this way: “These are obstacles and conditioning that go well beyond the actions and brief life span of the individual, and interfere also in the process of the development of peoples, the delay and slow pace of which must be judged in this light.”⁷² We will return momentarily to issues of "structural sin" and its dialogue with social justice and theological studies happening during the early period of Liberation Theology.

The politics of faith & faith in politics: development of a politicized church

The Vatican published *Rerum Novarum* almost half a century after Karl Marx published the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. The late nineteenth century was already showing the emerging crisis of capitalism's growing inequality that would plague the twentieth century, and the Church was beginning to realize that the effort to rebuild the faith was going to have to be done from the ground up. *Rerum Novarum* began the process of empowering laymen and women to officially participate in the "apostolic task" through Catholic Action, an organization that had its roots in pastoral efforts outside Rome.⁷³

⁷² “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*, paragraph 119, accessed July 2, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

⁷³ Ana María Bidegain Greising, *From Catholic Action to Liberation Theology: The Historical Process of the Laity in Latin America in the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame: Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 1985) 6, accessed July 1, 2014, <https://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/048.pdf>.

Catholic Action would be revised by subsequent popes. Their interests in the movement were primarily about upholding the hierarchy of faith. Pope Pius X voiced the pontifacts' concerns in the Encyclical from 1905, *Il Fermo Proposito*.

We must touch, Venerable Brethren, on another point of extreme importance, namely, the relation of all the works of Catholic Action to ecclesiastical authority. If the teachings unfolded in the first part of this letter are thoughtfully considered it will be readily seen that all those works which directly come to the aid of the spiritual and pastoral ministry of the Church and which labor religiously for the good of souls must in every least thing be subordinated to the authority of the Church and also to the authority of the Bishops placed by the Holy Spirit to rule the Church of God in the dioceses assigned to them. Moreover...Catholic Action, by no means may be considered as independent of the counsel and direction of ecclesiastical authority...⁷⁴

Part of this concern, which might be understood as a need for centralized control, was also a symptom of an infrastructural problem that was widespread in Latin America. The dwindling power of the church in the region was echoed in the dwindling influence of local parishes. In *Il Fermo Proposito* Pius X was also voicing an interest in having laity be an "extension" of the action of the clergy, thereby multiplying their effect.

⁷⁴ "Il Fermo Proposito" *The Holy See Archives*, paragraph 22, accessed July 1, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11061905_il-fermo-proposito_en.html.

By the start of the 20th century, the church in Latin America was forced to fight off the impending influence brought on by industrialization and capitalism, while also combating political pressure from a liberal class that tended to be anti-clerical and eager to supplant the power of the old social sanctions rooted in the structures of the colonial period, with the “democratizing” power of money. In Europe, early interest within the Catholic Action movement dealt with recruiting young people, often in workplace settings, to assist in restoring a Catholic social order. Many of them, including the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse, founded in 1886 by Francaise Albert de Mun, tended to move towards a modernizing view of the social order.⁷⁵ The Church, for its part, understood that modernity had brought about situations where the working classes in Europe were “being lost” to the church and that the Jeunesse Ouvrier Catholique (Young Catholic Workers) movement that Belgian priest Joseph Cardign developed was addressing such concerns.⁷⁶ Despite their theological and theoretical success as a model, JOC was primarily operating in small groups of working-class laborers, not having the ambition to establish larger regional or international networks.

The methodology Cardign sought to establish through social teaching came to be known as “see-judge-act.” The process — a metaphor for lay engagement and social empowerment — asked participants to look for concrete facts, see their social realities (often in discussion groups), judge them in light of

⁷⁵ Bidegain Greising, *From Catholic Action to Liberation Theology*, 4.

⁷⁶ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 65.

the Christian principles, decide whether they were in accordance with the gospel, and finally act to change and correct those realities. At the following meeting, the group would evaluate its commitment as well as the effectiveness of its actions. The “see-judge-act” methodology was derived from Thomas Aquinas’ 13th-century teachings on the principle cardinal virtue of Prudence, but is still actively in use today. Cardign’s Belgian context had him working with factory laborers, having them ask questions about the economic and social realities they saw around them. The reading of those realities through the lens of the gospel not only led to a politicization of that gospel reading, but to an investigation and a defense of the interests of their own class. Within this pedagogical model, the religious formation of a young worker was interwoven with his/her labor, family context, and lived social situation.

This socioanalytic process entails a structural analysis adopted from Marxist historical materialism that takes the reality of class struggle as an analytic datum. The hermeneutic reinterpretation of the Bible and its selection of readings based on newfound knowledge brought about by these reflections was drawn from the participant’s lived empirical perspective — what came to be understood within Liberation Theology parlance as knowledge from the perspectives of the poor. Finally, within the workshop a commitment is made to change social relations.

The Latin American version of this dialogical workshop, having a closer proximity to the Christian faith than its European counterparts, was replicated on a wide scale, extending to entire villages and neighborhoods, as opposed to the workplace concentrations in Europe. In Latin America, the Catholic Action movement was first established in the 1930s. After WWII it became more socially conscious of class differences and pro-actively sought out students, workers and farmers where “see-judge-act” was enthusiastically embraced by liberation theologians in Latin America.

This model, based on an understanding of "social Catholicism," was understood as the French model of Catholic Action, based on the work of Cardign during this period. From this early Belgian/French model came three Latin American branches. JAC (Juventud Agrícola Católica), JOC (Juventud Obrera Católica), and JUC (Juventud Universitaria Católica) emerged and grew at varying rates. While the JAC were particularly successful in Argentina and the JOC grew rapidly in Brazil, the groups did not all take hold as effectively in other countries. In countries like Bolivia, Catholic groups opted for labor leadership schools (or labor unions in Venezuela). The development and growth of Catholic Action groups found an important climactic event in the II Interamerican Study Week of 1953 at Chambote, Peru, where delegates from twenty Latin American countries gathered and later generated a report describing the social realities and inequalities of the region — giving it a "this worldly" analytical character not

typical of Latin American Catholicism up to that point.⁷⁷ This report remained a guide for Acción Católica for years to come and was reaffirmed in subsequent gatherings.

* * *

With Pius XI (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931) the position of the church on socialism begins to shift. Pius perceives that socialism has changed in the forty years since *Rerum Novarum*. The communistic form must be rejected, but there is a "mitigated socialism" that has some affinity with the principles of Christianity. Third World theologians today carry the argument further, arguing that some forms of socialism have greater affinity to the principles of Christianity than do any other known forms of political economy. But Pius was not ready for that. Instead, he says, "Religious socialism, Christian socialism, are contradictory terms; no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist."⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the ecclesiastical perception of socialism was changing.

Pius anticipates Liberation Theology in another way. Probably for the first time, the church under Pius sees sin as collectivized. In modern industrial life, injustice and fraud take place under guises not previously understood by the church:

⁷⁷ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 5.

⁷⁸ "Quadragesimo Anno," *The Holy See Archives*, paragraph 120.

The laws passed to promote corporate business, while dividing and limiting the risk of business, have given occasion to the most sordid license. For We observe that consciences are little affected by this reduced obligation of accountability; that furthermore, by hiding under the shelter of a joint name, the worst of injustices and frauds are penetrated.⁷⁹

The Latin American bishops at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) spoke forcefully about institutionalized injustices and collective sin. This represents a major shift in traditional Catholic (and Protestant Evangelical) thinking, as Catholics historically had almost uniformly refused to recognize anything more than individual injustice and sin.⁸⁰

In his seminal publication *A Theology of Liberation* (which gave the movement its name), Gustavo Gutierrez writes:

Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man [sic], in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation. It cannot be encountered in itself, but only in concrete instances, in particular alienations. It is impossible to understand the concrete manifestations without understanding the underlying basis and vice versa. Sin demands a radical liberation, which in turn necessarily implies a political liberation. Only by participating in the historical

⁷⁹ Ibid., paragraph 132.

⁸⁰ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 58.

process of liberation will it be possible to show the fundamental alienation present in every partial alienation.⁸¹

One could argue that there is the influence of critical Marxist thought within this understanding of sin as it attributes to the Church and other foundational institutions the guilt - and coterminously the responsibility - from which they had previously been immune.⁸²

The most important document emerging from Vatican II's deliberations, *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope): *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, was one of the four Apostolic Constitutions published in 1965. Chapter five of *Gaudium et Spes*, entitled "The Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations," specifically called for the Vatican to have an "organization of the universal Church whose task it would be to arouse the Catholic community to promote progress of areas which are in want and foster social justice between nations." It urged church leaders to better respond to "the signs of the times" — that is, the social and political contexts in which the religious faithful lived. The language of social justice and inequality are present throughout the document:

⁸¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 175–76.

⁸² Herndl and Bauer, "Speaking Matters," 574.

Therefore, although rightful differences exist between men, the equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.⁸³

If an authentic economic order is to be established on a world-wide basis, an end will have to be put to profiteering, to national ambitions, to the appetite for political supremacy, to militaristic calculations, and to machinations for the sake of spreading and imposing ideologies.⁸⁴

The council, considering the immensity of the hardships which still afflict the greater part of mankind today, regards it as most opportune that an organism of the universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.⁸⁵

These three citations from *Gaudium et Spes* share two key characteristics.

They explicitly place the onus of responsibility to call out such instances of structural sin on the Catholic Church. They equally represent a much-needed vehicle for the church to move towards an *aggiornamento* of its world view (and the language with which it communicates that world view) in a late-1960s era of political liberation movements around the globe.

⁸³ "Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," *The Holy See Archives*, paragraph 29, accessed July 1, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph 85.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraph 90.

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One central point of convergence between the revolutionary Third World discourse examined in the previous chapter and the Liberationists was the centrality of poverty as a defining issue. Vatican II never made poverty a major issue, but it did enough on a number of related issues and began a process of auto-reflection that opened the church's position on the division of wealth as a major concern in Latin American theology. Although not officially a part of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's 1967 *Popularum Progression* (On the People's Progress) focused on Third World concerns, particularly uneven development, for the first time; its focus was made possible by the tone of Vatican II.

The long-standing history of the church's support for the wealthy and their interests in Latin America was opened up. The problem of poverty was framed as a theological question through an interrogation of "structural sin" that had serious ramifications for the practice of faith and is the groundwork upon which Liberation Theology was built. The other major shift in relation to doctrine and faith was the church's embrace of lay groups like *Acción Católica* which brought the participation of the laity into the apostolic hierarchy and led to the subsequent transformation of Catholic teaching in their hands. These were two major developments that were brought about through the theological work of priests

and thinkers considering the radical changes happening around them in the real world.

Christ's statement "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"⁸⁶ is often understood as a religious order's vow of poverty, but the question of agonizing human suffering in the face of vast income inequalities was a question that the twentieth-century Church was compelled to answer. The pressing issue of poverty, particularly in Latin America, was addressed theologically on numerous fronts. Liberation theologians claim that the poor are blessed as they are the ones to receive the good news that has been brought. It is God's presence amongst the poor that is unique in the Bible:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."⁸⁷

The Peruvian-born theologian Gustavo Gutierrez offers three important theological arguments against poverty. First, he says, poverty contradicts the meaning and promise of the story of Exodus, its mission of liberation, and the

⁸⁶ Matthew 5:3.

⁸⁷ Luke 4:18–19

Mosaic religion. Exodus 3:7-10, the story of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, is clearly read to demonstrate that God takes the side of the poor and oppressed.⁸⁸

I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.⁸⁹

Secondly, Gutierrez argues that oppression and slavery go against the "creation mandate" found within the book of Genesis (1:1-2:3) — to find creative freedom achieved through work is to fulfill God's mandate. In this text, God creates humanity in his image and mandates humanity to live according to that image. In Genesis 2:4-25, God states that humanity needs to exercise dominion, to be fruitful and multiply, to receive God's provision, to work in relationships, and to observe the limits of creation.⁹⁰

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."⁹¹

⁸⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, revised ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 167.

⁸⁹ Exodus 3:7–10

⁹⁰ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 168.

⁹¹ Genesis 1:28.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.⁹²

Thirdly, Gutierrez argues that being in His image, existing as a human being, is the very sacrament of God, because 'to oppress the poor is to offend God; to know God is to work justice among human beings. We meet God in our encounter with men. What is done for others is done for the Lord.'⁹³ This reading is one of historical and biblical destiny in arguing for the liberation of the poor — in this life. Gutiérrez here is arguing that one can only understand God by recognizing the Bible and scripture as messianic words of liberation and that poverty is an expression of sin. To know God was to work against the kind of dehumanizing poverty that would be addressed by social scientists and newly founded research centers of the era.⁹⁴ Gutierrez stressed that there was a difference between being poor in spirit — the kind of poverty the Bible expounds as an openness to God — and the abject poverty he saw around him — the material poverty that the Bible understands as an evil. He synthesizes these two understandings of poverty undertaken as "a commitment of solidarity and protest."⁹⁵

Poverty is an act of love and liberation. It has a redemptive value. If the ultimate cause of human exploitation and alienation is

⁹² Genesis 2:15.

⁹³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (1988), 168.

⁹⁴ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 32.

⁹⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (1988), 171.

selfishness, the deepest reason for voluntary poverty is love of neighbor. Christian poverty has meaning only as a commitment of solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer misery and injustice. The commitment is to witness to the evil which has resulted from sin and is a breach of communion. It is not a question of idealizing poverty, but rather of taking it on as it is—an evil—to protest against it and to struggle to abolish it... Because of this solidarity—which must manifest itself in specific action, a style of life, a break with one's social class—one can also help the poor and exploited to become aware of their exploitation and seek liberation from it. Christian poverty, an expression of love, is solidarity with the poor and is a protest against poverty. This is the concrete, contemporary meaning of the witness of poverty. It is a poverty lived not for its own sake, but rather as an authentic imitation of Christ; it is a poverty which means taking on the sinful human condition to liberate humankind from sin and all its consequences.⁹⁶

The implications to his call for solidarity with the poor go beyond the theological. Andrew Irvine puts it best when he states, "So long and insofar as the Christian church is not committed to this struggle, it is unfaithful to the divine promise that constitutes it."⁹⁷ As noted above, Gutierrez's argument for a view of poverty that was open to God was the call for action. He argued that there were not two historical periods: one of God, the sacred, and one of Man, the profane. Rather, there was one way to salvation and it was to struggle for salvation in the here and now. As he states, "the construction of the human being himself, through the historical political struggle" is understood by the book of Exodus as a struggle that is communitarian, not private or individual. This view of

⁹⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁹⁷ Andrew B. Irvine, "Liberation Theology as a Postcolonial Critique of Theological Reason: An Examination of Early Writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez," *Australian Religion Studies Review* 25, no. 2 (October, 2012): 145, accessed July 4, 2014, doi:10.1558/arsr.v25i2.139.

liberation of an entire oppressed people is not one of pity or charity, as has been typically argued by the Church, but is a call to all humanity to see the poor in Latin America, much like the Hebrews in the Old Testament, as subjects of their own emancipation.⁹⁸ As we will see, this third meaning of poverty as a praxis of action/reflection towards liberation not only makes a fundamental contribution to theology, but speaks to a larger cultural methodology — a praxis — of cultural action that has been exercised by Paolo Freire and others working towards social and cultural change.

* * *

In its *aggiornamento*, opening itself to the modern world, the Church, particularly in Latin America, could not evade the social conflicts of the 1960s, which were shaping the world and agitating the status quo. It could deny neither the influence of various philosophical and political currents, particularly Marxism, which was at that time the dominant cultural tendency among the Latin American intelligentsia, nor the political movements calling for an end to the inequality and bloody repression happening around them.⁹⁹ Following our outline, I now begin to concentrate on the foundations of Liberation Theology in Latin America from the socio-political perspective. One of the most important of these was the development of Dependency Theory and the language of neo-colonialism that

⁹⁸ Löwy, *The War of Gods*, 46.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

began to shape social theory. The failure of the prevailing development economic model — *Desarollismo* — had left countries in the newly designated Third World further behind and saddled in debt. Many countries in Latin America throughout the 1960s were under military-backed dictatorships and contending with massive human-rights violations that are still being unearthed to this day. Cities like Mexico City, Rosario, Bogota, Buenos Aires, Santiago, San Salvador, and La Paz have their histories tied to political violence during this period. Military coups and repressive governments were the norm: Brazil (1964), Bolivia (1971), Uruguay (1973), Chile (1973), Argentina (1976), while the military forces in Peru (1975) and Ecuador (1976) renewed their interventions within their respective military-led governments.

Within the socio-political spectrum, the other major influences on Liberation Theology were the political and cultural movements resisting oppression. During the 1960s, examples are numerous. Father Camilo Torres, the former national chaplain to the university student movement in Colombia, took up revolutionary arms with the United Front guerrilla movement and was killed in combat in 1966. His teachings were largely based on his training in the Louvain seminary in Belgium — Gustavo Gutiérrez being another famous alum — but his willingness to sacrifice his life for his Christian beliefs, based on the call to address inequality and his movement from theological concerns to political action, made him an influential figure for Christians in Latin America. Groups like

the Teoponte (1970) near La Paz, Bolivia, might have started down this armed path through Christian convictions, but they also hoped to continue the work of Che Guevara, who had been assassinated in that country three years earlier. There is a continuing need, one that cannot be properly addressed in this text, to consider the liberatory movement's both pedagogical and theological relationship with Marxist teachings, and vice versa. Political revolutionary movements during this period in Latin America almost always had "liberation" as part of their self-designation. Marxists considering these developments will often resort to the distinction between the important political work they engage in and social practice of Christians exercising their praxis and theology, defined as "necessarily regressive and idealist."¹⁰⁰ However, with Liberation Theology, we see the appearance of religious thinking using Marxist concepts and inspiring struggles for social and political liberation.

Almost every text written on the history of Liberation Theology cites the central influence the Cuban Revolution had on the original framers of the movement. Fidel Castro's 1959 overthrow of the corrupt Batista regime was hugely influential. His small band of guerrilla idealists created a movement that took over a country despite a standing army and a large U.S. presence. By doing so, he showed the rest of Latin America that such idealism could work. Again, questions about the divide between rich and poor formed the central discourse

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5.

and frame through which Castro became an influential figure. It spoke to and expanded the Third World-ist conversation already developing in the so-called developing world and influenced an entire generation of thinkers and cultural actors in the process.

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Latin American social scientists were beginning to question what the history of development - *desarollismo* - had promised: namely, that a conventional model of growth out of backwardness would be achieved by following the path already traced out by the advanced countries of the North Atlantic channel. If a study of the history of Latin America's economic role in the western world were to be examined, it would be to no one's surprise that the history was written in Western Europe, and later the United States. Latin Americas' economic history was one of dependence, built on the massive exploitation of exportation of raw goods and natural materials for the purposes of enriching the international centers of production and their local allies. The explanation for this underdevelopment was a structural inequality that had less to do with backwardness than it did with dependency. That framing of a structural problem was by no means new, but it became a central concern and focus not only for the analysis of economics, but for research within the social and human

sciences around the time when Liberation Theology was being developed.¹⁰¹ The shift away from paradigms of "advanced/backwards" towards "dominant/dependent" was beginning to influence not only radical political thinkers, but the clergy as well.

The most direct way that these shifts in perspective were manifesting themselves within the clergy were the intense debates happening within the CELAM conferences themselves. Since the conferences were developed uniquely for their contexts, their changes and approaches reflected the changing perspectives of the Latin American clergy themselves. One of the important changes that happened between the initial 1955 CELAM conference in Rio and the subsequent 1968 conference in Medellín was the shift towards pastoral representation from functional sectors within the conference, which meant that the issues would be discussed from the perspective of those doing the pastoral work on the ground. Another important change was the adoption of the now famous methodology espoused in the Vatican II document *Gaudem et Spes*: "fact/reflection/recommendations," a clearly referenced relationship to Joseph Cardign's methodology known as "see, judge, act". The call to see facts meant that the traditional dogmatic top-down perspective of seeing the world through biblical and philosophical hermeneutics would be replaced with one based on observable real-world facts and conditions.

¹⁰¹ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 20.

This shift in perspective towards facts and data required research and coordination that was not in place within the Latin American pastoral circuit. During the two years it took to prepare for Medellín, workshops and think tanks were developed to consider social issues that needed much investigation. Vatican II's call for *aggiornamento* was written from the perspective of European bishops and led the discussion on European interests. The call was needed for a church that operated in its own time to also operate in its own place, namely from a Latin American perspective. Edward Cleary calls this *Latinamericanization*: a process of wrenching theology and world views from a derivative nature guided by Rome and a purely philosophical framing of theology towards one that was grounded in social realities from the region in question.¹⁰²

Members of Acción Católica and other lay movements took on the important role of "difusión" or dissemination of the teachings of Vatican II. Development institutes that taught religious research to adult Christians sprang up. From these early organizations came a formal transnational network called FERES (Federation of Religious and Social Studies). In the early 1960s, FERES undertook important "sociographical" studies of each Latin American country and church that were subsequently published as a series of studies throughout the region. The Centro de Economía y Humanismo (Center for Economy and

¹⁰² Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 24.

Humanism) in Montevideo and the IEPAL (Institute of Political Studies for Latin America) in Buenos Aires, as well as the Jesuit-run CIAS (Center for Social Investigation and Action), were examples of important research centers that helped bring researchers and theologians together.¹⁰³ This was an important development, given the isolation most bishops felt, not only from Rome, but from each other within their own regions and countries. As mentioned above, the lack of infrastructure led to a disconnect between the parish and the vast countrysides where most South American Catholics resided. The advancement towards reading theology via the social sciences during the 60s was a major development, which in turn fueled more theological questions concerning the violence and inequality so prevalent in the region.

It would be very easy to overstate or exaggerate the position the church clergy had towards repressive political regimes and political violence in general. For every example of the church organizing itself and its parish against repressive governments, as was the case in Paraguay and its opposition to the dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner led by Bishop Ramón Bogarín, one of Latin America's early supporters of a "preferential option for the poor," there are examples in which the Church turned a blind eye to atrocities — some even going so far as to support the conflict, as was the case in Colombia. Still others, as was the case in Brazil, even welcomed the coup of 1964. It would also be

¹⁰³ Ibid., 30.

natural to overstate the importance that both Vatican II (1963-65) and the Medellín conference (1968) had for the grassroots organizing or political consciousness of peoples all over the Latin American continent. The truth is that there were changes already happening. The history of colonial repression and increasing dependency and poverty were settings that would inevitably lead to resistance. As mentioned earlier, the victory of the Cuban Revolution did much to raise certain questions concerning larger social and political issues. These were conditions already present when Vatican II and the formalization of Liberation Theology began to be appreciated. As the bishops themselves understood, it is the context that determines the way forward. These two seminal events should be, and have been, discussed as two points in a progression of political, theological, and cultural resistance that began in the late fifties and goes on to this day. Nevertheless, Vatican II and Medellín were crucial stops along the way, if only because the small, but vocal group of progressive bishops, now emboldened with theological support from Vatican II, were able to gain momentum and begin to set the agenda for the 2nd CELAM in Medellín in 1968 and for future social/theological studies in Latin America. The bishops were one central and important element in a wider struggle for liberation and social justice.

In Latin America during the 1960s, thirteen constitutional governments were replaced by military dictatorships. If the bishops in Latin America didn't immediately respond to the shift to repressive governments, they did so

gradually, often spurred by the arrest, detention, torture, or even murder of fellow clergymen. Considered as a whole, the diverse bishop's conferences of the various Latin American countries produced and circulated hundreds of statements on social issues and human rights. As Cleary points out, during the 70s many theologians were weary, often outright critical, of the framing of violence as a discussion around "human rights." One key figure was the Uruguayan Jesuit theologian Juan Luis Segundo, who published numerous articles arguing for the contextual nature of human rights. When he writes: "With the exception of a few countries, the hungry cannot present a legal complaint in any court, neither national nor international,"¹⁰⁴ Segundo is pointing out the contradictions of speaking of a "right to life" when those rights have few, if any, juridical recourse. Thusly, he had a critical view of "human rights" discourse that was not context-specific and therefore ignored the structural oppression of colonization and domination. He believed that there was no universal evangelical method, thus arguing for the placement of the gospel in its social and historical context. Segundo argued that evangelization and the Christian message needed to be grounded in the communities and establish a relationship with the person or group with whom they meant to share the message.¹⁰⁵ His implication, and ultimately his theological argument, is for a non-universal view of human rights

¹⁰⁴ Juan Luis Segundo, "Derechos humanos, evangelización e ideología," in *Carter y la logica del imperialismo*, tomo II, ed. Hugo Assmann (San José, Costa Rica: Colección DEI, 1978), 347.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Tennant, "Placing Robert Hall in Dialogue with Juan Luis Segundo on the Issue of Human Rights," *American Baptist Quarterly* 27, no. 8 (Fall 2008), accessed July, 2, 2014, users.ox.ac.uk/~rege0695/Hall_Segundo.pdf.

that is not based on "human ideals" but rather on laws — laws that from his perspective were not in place in Latin America. Segundo argues that people in developed countries project guilt over human rights violations onto people in less developed countries. The people who define human rights, and often defend those rights (the First World), also make that defense impossible throughout most of the world.¹⁰⁶ Segundo goes on to critique the church for continuing to define abuses and oppression through the lens of an abstract understanding of universal good and evangelization. Defending "human rights" was simple and non-divisive. Critiquing the structural systems of oppression that were found in the impossible conditions wealthy countries maintained over poor countries meant taking a risk and disrupting the status quo. Ultimately he argued for the "rights of the poor" since it was they whose rights were being violated.¹⁰⁷

* * *

The development model carried out in the Third World from the 1950s through the 1980s was an area of concerted investigation during this period of intense social science research leading up to, and extending beyond, the Medellín conference. Many of the social scientists associated with Liberation Theology emphasized that underdevelopment was structurally conditioned by the

¹⁰⁶ Segundo, "Derechos humanos," 349.

¹⁰⁷ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 117.

exploitation of foreign economic powers maintaining Latin America in a system of dependency on hegemonic centers, otherwise known as Dependency Theory.

The crisis in the social sciences, sociology and economics in particular, led to a series of questions around the *developmentalism* that was the model for progress in Latin America. Given the wide range of regional studies that researchers within the church were engaging in at this time, the questions led to not only those on a theological level, but towards the root causes of oppression and underdevelopment. From the perspective of the United States, the development model in Latin America was seen as an extension of the successes of the Marshall Plan. Named the Point Four Program in Harry Truman's inaugural address of 1949, the plan was to support Third World nations with expertise and "know-how" and help nations develop with technical assistance. One key factor in starting the Point Four Program (now known as the Agency for International Development, or AID, after several subsequent name changes) was the fear of the spread of communism within "developing nations." After several years, and with very little progress to show for it, the US government's attention turned to developing "human resources" — education and training — in order to acquire the desired effects seen in post-war Europe and Japan. Import substitution industrialization (ISI), was a development theory that quickly turned into economic and trade policy that supported domestic production over foreign imports. ISI was another key theme, with the Inter-American Development Bank,

the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank playing key roles in bankrolling various projects.¹⁰⁸ Many ISI theorists and economists came to prominence with the creation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, known as ECLAC, in 1948.

In 1961 John F. Kennedy drew up the Alliance for Progress with the aim of establishing economic cooperation between the U.S. and Latin America. Economic aid packages to Latin America nearly tripled between 1960 and 1961. Aid packages were tied to development projects that required loans to be repaid. In the end, the debt payments overtook any amount of aid and the limited economic growth that was attained could only be seen as a failure by critics who cited the punishing debt that was taken on while U.S. banks expanded into the region and earned large profits at the expense of weakened governments. Another major criticism of the Alliance was its inability to promote reformist civilian rule and its willingness to work with dictators and oppressive regimes. By the time Nixon cut back funding for AID in the late 60s, military dictatorships in Latin America were the norm. The Organization of American States (OAS) effectively dissolved the structural implementation of the alliance in 1973.

Hugo Assmann, a Brazilian theologian trained in Frankfurt, played a pioneering role in the 1970s by elaborating the first elements of a Christian and

¹⁰⁸ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 31.

liberationist critique of *desarrollismo* (developmentalism).¹⁰⁹ In contemporary terms, Latin America is still debating this set of theories known as *desarrollismo* even as they are being discredited on many fronts. By 1990, Latin America was in its worst financial recession since the 1930s, and servicing of the debt took up about 40% of the region's exports. After the regional financial meltdown of the early 2000s and the ensuing popular protests that led to a "pink tide" of populist and left leaning rulers, the fact is that many Latin American countries are still paying off international debt.

The development of theological argumentation and contextual frames founded on social science research was a fundamental advancement for the Church and made possible the opening up of a more critical paradigm shift from seminary- to university-focused concerns. Economic realities became an important lens through which supporters of Liberation Theology could introduce Dependency Theory and the language of neo-colonialism into the Church's concerns. Dependency Theory was also an important development in the growing list of in-depth thought that was emerging from Latin America during mid-century. Dependency and class analysis was central to framing the Latin American context and thinkers such as Enrique Dussel, Ruben Alves, Raul Videles and others described their society through the study of structural and institutional sin, the spiral of violence, and the injustices of global capitalism. The

¹⁰⁹ Löwy, *The War of Gods*, 45.

idea that the Church was being brought down to earth takes on new meaning when one considers the immense amount of social and political analysis that was generated, the number of social study institutes formed, and ultimately the number of community organizations that were activated and became integral parts of the liberation movement.

Dussel takes this a step further and says that theologians should search history for facts and interpretations — to no longer rely on philosophy as the central supplementary support for theological work.¹¹⁰ Latin America's political realities needed to be the context for raising both social and theological questions. Theologically, what had been previously understood as a "universal" church, was beginning to be questioned and assessed as a North-Atlantic model, with all the social, political, and colonial frameworks that designation implies.¹¹¹ Social injustices had to be addressed by a theological model that was willing and able to understand local issues. Grappling with economic dependency also meant looking for a unique theological perspective that reflected the interests of the region and, ultimately, the needs of those who have been historically oppressed.

Dependency Theory essentially argues that underdeveloped countries were established and continue to be maintained as producers of raw materials

¹¹⁰ Enrique D. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

¹¹¹ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 86.

and agricultural products by an international division of labor that privileges first world economies. The Medellín Conference (1968) accepted economic as well as political dependence as a fact.

We refer here, particularly, to the implications for all countries of dependence on a center of economic power, around which they gravitate. For this reason, our nations frequently do not own their goods, or have a say in economic decisions affecting them. It is obvious that this will not fail to have political consequences given the interdependence of these two fields.¹¹²

* * *

Catholicism's relationship to economics has always been a point of interest to scholars studying the development of capitalism, particularly at its point of inception in the 18th century. Scholars such as Bernard Groethuysen¹¹³ or Max Weber¹¹⁴ have written extensively about these topics from the perspective that Catholicism somehow had an anti-capitalist ethos. In the United States, given the blind and immediate dismissal generally exercised against anything reminding us of communism, it is easy to understand why the study of Liberation Theology carries a level of intrigue. If we consider the U.S.

¹¹² CELAM, "2ra. Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano: Documento Conclusivo de Medellín," (1969), accessed July 3, 2014, http://www.celam.org/conferencia_medellin.php.

¹¹³ Bernard Groethuysen, *The Bourgeois: Catholicism vs. Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France*, trans. M. Ilford, 1st edition (New York: Barrie & Jenkins, 1968), 20.

¹¹⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, abridged ed. (Merchant Books, 2013).

government's direct role in funding "contras" in Nicaragua to fight "communists" in the 80s, we will inevitably have to face that reactionary moment where the radicalization of the clergy in that particular region and the eventual migratory ramifications of such policies are rooted in the spectra of historic anxieties.

The truth is that theologians in Latin America devote very little space to discussing Marxism in any direct way. Nevertheless, there is a relationship, even if an indirect one. In Latin America, the move towards the social sciences is a move towards working with an intellectual class and history that has been predominantly exposed to Marxist traditions of critique. This is particularly true within the fields of economics and sociology, so understanding Marxism would have been useful to anyone attempting serious research into the inequalities of the region. In fact, it would be remarkable if a movement that was dedicated to social change within any "third world" context was not influenced by Marxist theory.¹¹⁵ The importance of systematic, structural, and class analysis learned from the social sciences is the hallmark of Marxist critique. Edward Cleary points out that ecclesiastical scholars like Segundo, Gutierrez and others argue that this new form of theology cannot be learned in the traditional way. It cannot be

¹¹⁵ Latin America's most influential Marxist thinker, Peruvian-born José Carlos Mariátegui, broke free of the international Stalinist models and the Comintern and chose to emphasize a more flexible form of Marxism via the contextual specifics of Latin America's various modern colonial realities, including its persistent feudalism and continued exploitation of indigenous peoples.

understood "behind seminary walls by teachers and students isolated from the day-to-day struggles of the church in the world." ¹¹⁶

After Vatican II and the development of this "new" theology, the church was no longer a grouping of the faithful organized within a strict hierarchical organization. Liberation Theology required both a class and structural analysis to accompany a biblical one. The church and the world are seen through those lenses; thus it is not only theology that has a new meaning, but also the concept of "church." This "dialectical" model of the social sciences, one that assumes that conflicts may lead to a systematic change, is a tradition that is very different from the theological tradition exercised in the past. One key figure in this change is the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, who called for a dialectical analysis of the systems of imbalance and conflict that affect the poor and the oppressed, always moving towards a more fully Christian practice.

One other point of conversion between Marxists and many Christians is the goal of striving towards utopia. While Marxists strive for a form of humanism that is both classless and absolute, the liberation theologian preaches for a perfect God who is equally universal and demanding of human achievement. But this only explains certain convergences and affinities, and this text is not the place to explore them fully. Nevertheless, there are certain historical events that

¹¹⁶ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 64.

shed some light on how Liberation Theology developed a praxis geared towards social research and how the history of Marxism's uneasy relationship with "American" theology creates certain conditions for Liberation Theology's growth and actions in Latin America. Another point of convergence is the condition of persecution that befell early Christians and the way socialist thinkers, most notably Friedrich Engels, create the link between the "revolutionary religion" that he saw in the early Christian faith and the absolute materialism found in the fight against modern socialism.¹¹⁷ He saw them both as mass movements that were not only persecuted by the authorities and those in power, but were led from the ground up towards liberation. Engels saw a potentially revolutionary and organizational role for religion that could be played in this arena, but he was famously suspicious of the religions of his time. It is this position of persecution, perhaps, that also links Marxism to Liberation Christianity. Both have immense faith in a better world, here and now. Writers such as Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Bloch, and Antonio Gramsci famously have written about this relationship. Gramsci noted how every religion has its contradictions and its multiplicities, saying, "there is a Catholicism for the peasants, a Catholicism for the petty bourgeoisie and urban workers, a Catholicism for women, and a Catholicism for intellectuals."¹¹⁸ Gramsci critiqued religion, particularly the Catholic Church he witnessed in Italy, as not "organic" because it was not

¹¹⁷ Löwy, *The War of Gods*, 8.

¹¹⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers Co, 1971), 328.

connected to any modern social class and generally sided with the bourgeoisie.¹¹⁹

Liberation theologians were aware of the importance and necessity of always demonstrating the Christian nature and objectives of their work. It is true that Leonardo Boff was often disciplined by the Church for his "inflammatory" rhetoric, and he had been accused, on more than one occasion, of being a political agitator. But he was also a careful and prolific theologian who produced important advancements in theology. For liberation theologians, there was always a reminder of the need to preemptively head-off critics who were eager to paint them all in with a large brush as "half-baptized" Marxists or be too closely associated with the writers cited above. Historians have often made the claim that the military-led rule that predominated in the early 70s was a reaction to the "chaos" of the social movements of the 1960s and the anti-communist propagandizing, and perhaps more importantly, the threat of withdrawal of financial support on the part of the United States. Nevertheless, there were several key encounters and statements made — those made in Medellín will be explored more fully below — that raised eyebrows and gave critics ammunition. One key obstacle that will be discussed was the appointment of John Paul II as pope and the opposition of Cardinal Ratzinger.

¹¹⁹ Löwy, *The War of Gods*, 14.

When the delegates at the 1972 Christians for Socialism conference in Santiago, Chile, enthusiastically stated that "the revolutionary process in Latin America is in full swing," they could not have anticipated the military repression that quickly followed. That conference, which was organized by several key theologians, spoke of liberation in unambiguous social and political terms:

The real-life presence of the faith in the very heart of revolutionary praxis provides for a fruitful interaction. The Christian faith becomes a critical and dynamic leaven for revolution. Faith intensifies the demand that the class struggle move decisively towards the liberation of all men - in particular, those who suffer the most acute forms of oppression. It also stresses our orientation towards a total transformation of society rather than merely a transformation of economic structures. Thus, in and through committed Christians, faith makes its own contribution to the construction of a society that is qualitatively distinct from the present one, and to the appearance of the New Man.

But, revolutionary commitment also has a critical and motivating function vis-a-vis the Christian faith. It criticizes both the open and the more subtle forms of complicity between the faith and the dominant culture during the course of history... Christians involved in the process of liberation vividly come to realize that the demands of revolutionary praxis ... force them to rediscover the central themes of the gospel message — only now they are freed from their ideological dress.

The real context for a living faith today is the history of oppression and of the struggle for liberation from this oppression. To situate oneself within this context, however, one must truly participate in the process of liberation by joining parties and organizations that are authentic instruments of the struggle of the working class."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Christians for Socialism, *Documentation of the Christians for Socialism Movement in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 173. From Löwy, *The War of Gods*, 47.

By the time of the CELAM Puebla conference in 1979, the organizing body was determined to keep liberation theologians from framing the conference. The push-back had already begun, but it was to no avail, as the movement was still determined to move forward.

Christian Base Communities: community building through praxis

One central foundation for the rise of Liberatory pedagogies and theologies is the establishment of Christian Base Communities (Comunidades eclesiales de base) or CBCs, often defined as small lay-led communities who are motivated to be part of a larger church or ecclesiastical community. There is no exact date marking the beginning of the CBC movement. The development of CBCs in Latin America has unique antecedents that are tied to both Church doctrine and to a uniquely Latin American Catholic infrastructure problem: the inability of the Catholic Church to penetrate the communities and outlying neighborhoods outside the big cities. It was not uncommon for parishes in rural areas and shantytowns to rely on the services of one priest for tens of thousands of Catholic worshipers. For this central reason, attendance at Catholic services was, for the most part, very low. In most Latin American countries, five percent

attended Mass services.¹²¹ This inability to serve a large portion of the Catholic faithful was a leading cause in the development of lay-led community groups. The mass growth of CBCs was no small development in Latin America, as the history of the Catholic Church in the region is not without its historic complications. Early nineteenth-century independence movements led to an institutional crisis when the Vatican and the bishops sided with the Spanish Crown while local clerics mostly sided with the revolution. The ensuing fights between “conservative” and “liberal” governments meant the church was generally siding with Conservative governments in what were mutually beneficial partnerships maintaining the status quo. This was a precarious period in the Latin American Church's history, marked by attacks from ensuing Liberal governments calling for reforms that resulted in a weakened church unable to produce enough clergy. For this reason, as Berryman points out, in countries like Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Venezuela, Panama, and Bolivia, the clergy is roughly 80 percent foreign. It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century that the church began to rebound with the development of base community organizations and the Catholic Action movement.

The base communities arose as a response to the severe priest shortage across Latin America. They preceded the rise of the Liberation Theology movement and continue despite its decline. What the liberation theologians did

¹²¹ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 64.

was build upon the emerging but already existent base community movement, fortifying its infrastructure by situating the movement firmly within its larger pedagogical and political interests. Those pedagogical interests were being articulated by many voices, including that of Paolo Freire, who saw literacy as a cultural and political form of self-realization. He also saw that the dialogical model of group teaching was an important step in the larger democratic project of social justice:

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors — teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction to be resolved. Dialogical relations — indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object — are otherwise impossible.¹²²

This act of seeing education as a cyclical form of learning, or in the words of Freire, a form of praxis (action, reflection, action) is mirrored in Liberation Theology as the process by which faith is interpreted by way of the cyclical movement from lived experience to the study of biblical text to a new understanding of experience — often referred to as the "hermeneutical circle." The Bible is understood in terms of the reader's experience and then

¹²² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

reinterpreted in terms of biblical symbols towards an act of self-realization and potential political action.

As mentioned above, the methodology Cardign sought to establish through social teaching came to be known as “see-judge-act”: to see the facts as they are and to reflect or judge these facts by searching the Bible and church teachings in order to understand scripture in this context of actual facts. As Cleary states: “theologians using scripture have a twofold task: to attempt to understand the text in its historical situation, and then to reflect on what the text says to them in their historical situation. They thereby set up a back and forth tension, and interplay between the text and the person reflecting. It is a hermeneutical circle...”¹²³

The biggest structural change to the Church during the 1960s, leading up to the Medellín conference, was the rise of CBCs. This massive growth in numbers of lay Catholic movements was particularly apparent in Brazil and Central America and had the key distinction of having heavy involvement of women in poor urban areas. In one study in Brazil, over 60% of members were women which led to their involvement in political arenas and fighting for women’s issues. As Carol Drogus points out in her study on women’s roles in religious

¹²³ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 89.

communities in Brazil, many of the pastoral agents who helped organize CBCs were women.¹²⁴

Cardign's teaching methods might have been formalized in Europe, and the Vatican certainly did attempt to define Catholic Action groups in the wake of its popularity, but CBCs are profoundly Latin American in origin, even if their exact starting point cannot be determined. There were early models that were being developed in São Paulo in the late 50s and Panama City in the early 60s. After the Medellín conference referred to base communities as the "initial cell" for the church and its growth, CELAM training institutes were established in Chile, Ecuador and Colombia. The Brazilian Jose Marins and the Colombian Edgar Beltran worked and travelled throughout Latin America, giving courses on CBC development.¹²⁵

There are reportedly 3 million Latin American Catholics who take part in a CBC. Generally, twelve to twenty people make up a community, but the definitions and characteristics of these communities are varied, some having more of a pentecostal nature that tends to be less politically active, while most fall under the traditional definition of "post-Medellín" defined in the writings of Marins, who helped spread the "see-judge-act" methodology within CBCs.

¹²⁴ Carol Drogus, "Reconstructing the Feminine: Women in Sao Paulo's CEBS," *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, no. 71, July-September (1990), 63–74.

¹²⁵ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 67.

According to Marins, the aforementioned priest shortage and infrastructure problems often cited as a leading cause in the rises of CBCs also led to the development of creative and experimental structures within the parish to address the needs of their community. Conferences and workshops helped spread the innovations. One such innovation was the move to reduce the scale of the community to a more human scale — that of the neighborhood or village. Another change was the move towards concentrating on adult education. Traditionally the church's role in education was working with children of the elite through the Catholic school system. That shift towards working with adults also meant that one needed to rely on adults as collaborators with unique and specific skill sets. The idea of the rural or urban poor as ignorant peasants had to be laid to rest. Though many of the *campesinos* who had recently made their way to the urban areas had little formal education and very little exposure to church doctrine, or even the Bible, they possessed a good deal of imagination, creativity, and a natural inclination towards working together and sharing in small groups. Natural leaders from the community made their way to leadership positions within CBCs.¹²⁶

Another factor that has been discussed above is the increased use of social sciences and analytical tools to understand contexts while at the same

¹²⁶ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 108.

time the emphasis of working with the poor was learned and reinforced through the close, haptic, everyday work of CBCs — the interviews, conversations, and problem-solving that were a part of the daily work of collaborating with and within these communities. If a bishop's historic role in a vastly underserved community was to fulfill the demand for ritualistic services, like baptisms and ceremonies — something akin to dispensing favors — then the new post-Vatican II emphasis would shift this evangelizing method. Personal commitment, in-depth instruction, the empowerment of the laity and community, and a shift towards considering life and faith “in this world” helped address the fatalistic and paternal tendencies of the church in Latin America. It brought the church “down to earth” and gave people the sense that the church was not to be found in a building, but within a community. Base communities and their educational possibilities were to be heavily emphasized throughout the 1968 Medellín documents.

Empirical knowledge and philosophy in theology

Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, like his Argentine counterpart Enrique Dussel and others, has made a point of questioning the tradition of relying on philosophy in the process of justifying theological concepts and

conclusions.¹²⁷ For these thinkers, this inquiry requires a form of “decolonizing” of theological systematization from purely philosophical judgments of reason. Gutiérrez sets the “energy and diversity of reason” in the modern world in contrast to the rigid and official architectonics of Scholastic and Neo-Scholastic theologies, in which “the demands of rational knowledge will be reduced to the need for systematization and clear exposition.”¹²⁸ Gutiérrez has returned to this issue of the reductive tendency of philosophical theology time and time again. His vigilance and critique of the prevailing role of philosophy in understanding reason, and thus theology, is a central characteristic of Liberation Theology as a whole. His 1993 book *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* is a 600-page argument for the drastic reconstruction of the Church’s systematic theology.¹²⁹ The central argument in the book is not a theology proposal from a Latin American perspective, but a foundational and universal argument for revision and a concrete proposal for upending the current theological superstructure. His argument here is even more damning if one considers that his contention is that this process was begun 500 years ago by Las Casas: the implication being one of condemning the Church to acquiescing to power this entire time. What makes Gutiérrez’s argument for what he calls a “Lascasian soteriology” is that this historical figure not only blazed a new theological trail

¹²⁷ See Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, or Walter Mignolo in “Philosophy and the Colonial Difference” in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003).

¹²⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 5.

¹²⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2003), n.p.

towards a “preference towards the poor” but was able to do so without the aid of dependency or Marxist theory (the two most potent arguments made against Liberation Theology by the Vatican and Cardinal Ratzinger). The entire argument is based on a historical act by a sole actor seeing his reality — a lived and learned experience living amongst the poor in Latin America — and using a simple gospel message to fight against intellectual argumentation made in a faraway land. Las Casas here makes the argument for Liberation Theology and the preferential option of poor through time and history.

When Gutierrez says that theology is the “critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word,” he most assuredly is framing that lens through which light passes as the praxis itself, praxis being the already-critical and cyclical model of action/reflection. It is through Gutierrez’ argument for Las Casas that the empirical experience of the poor and of poverty questions the privileging of systematic, speculative concerns within philosophy as the definitive model of “reason” in relation to the practice of faith:

The function of theology as rational knowledge is also permanent— insofar as it is a meeting between faith and reason, not exclusively between faith and any one philosophy, nor even between faith and philosophy in general. Reason has, especially today, many other manifestations than philosophical ones. The understanding of the faith is also following along new paths in our day: the social, psychological, and biological sciences. The social sciences, for example, are extremely important for theological reflection in Latin America. Theological thought not characterized by such a

rationality and disinterestedness would not be truly faithful to an understanding on the faith.¹³⁰

Gutierrez does not argue that philosophy does not have a role to play, but rather that there are pressing issues that should dictate what is being considered, that one cannot continually give philosophy the sole prerogative to determine theological paths. Throughout the development of Liberation Theology and its larger pedagogical message, that message has been consistent: lived experiences and empirical knowledge gained from working/researching within communities must be the foundation for the development of theoretical positions and the construction of political subjectivities.

As Andrew Irvine argues, Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* asserts the view that "theology principally is worth whatever guidance it gives to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in specific practical situations. Abstract, speculative, systematic considerations may have import insofar as they are relevant to offering such guidance."¹³¹ Irvine suggests that Gutiérrez's own experience and scholarship demonstrate that those abstract and systematic considerations often found within philosophy distracted from and often perpetuated a cruel victimization of the vast majority of Latin America's inhabitants. Gutiérrez's documentation of Bartolomé de Las Casas' life is a study of "philosophy's

¹³⁰ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 5.

¹³¹ Irvine, "Liberation Theology as a Postcolonial Critique," 141.

criminal negligence.”¹³² He calls for theology to be “salvaged...from the deformations that have suffered throughout history.”¹³³

Gutierrez, and Liberation Theology as a whole, are not in the business of upending or replacing Western philosophy as much as they are of revealing a very concrete Eurocentrism that is operating at the heart of its universalizing claims. The term “underside of history” that Gutierrez uses has a double meaning; it is both an evocation of a dialectical negativity and of the complex relations that flow as both positive and negative ruptures, the contradictions that make up colonial existences.

Gutierrez argues for a theology that must arise from “particular believers or groups of believers, who reflect on their belief in determinate social conditions, in order to work out interpretations and courses of action that will affect those conditions—that will play a role in the events and struggles of a given society.”¹³⁴ This liberating form of theology carries with it a notable and important responsibility to the poor against a history of colonial brutality and paternalism. Theology’s reaction must represent the very “right of the poor to think.”¹³⁵ This demand reveals the “underside of history.” The occluded other in the historical

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 5.

¹³⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 91.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 90.

colonial matrix does indeed have the right to think and yet, it brings to mind the question Spivak poses when she asks, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Although the act here is one of thought, not of speech, the larger issue at play here for Gutierrez is the history of “right thinking” and the hegemony of cognitive colonialism, which we will turn to in a moment. Spivak’s question is an important one to address here.

Spivak’s essay reminds us that representation bears two senses here: “representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics and representation as ‘re-present,’ as in art or philosophy,” two crucial social practices through which the subject/community is constructed and enters the public sphere. As discussed in the previous chapter, she reminds us that the theoretician generally does not ‘speak for’ the oppressed group.

These two senses of representation — within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other — are related but irreducibly discontinuous. To cover over the discontinuity with an analogy that is presented as a proof reflects, again a paradoxical subject-privileging. Because the person who speaks and acts is always a multiplicity, no theorizing intellectual, or party, or union can represent those who act and struggle. Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to those who act and speak? These immense problems are buried in the difference between the “same words:...representation and re-presentation.”¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 275.

The participatory and community-centered life nurtured by the ecclesiastical communities and the collaborative pedagogy promoted by liberation theology produce a re-presentation of the poor, ideally by the poor. Yet, as Irving points out, it cannot be taken for granted that this self-representation, given the dehumanized social conditions under which many poor people in Latin America exist, is either sustainable or securable. This is where true theology, according to Gutierrez, is obligated to “represent” the right of the poor to think and to be advocates — to “speak for” the oppressed group. This role, an elaboration of the full meaning of the preferential option for the poor, is an advocacy — a “speaking for” — towards concrete political ends as a completion and fulfillment of the theological task.¹³⁷

This political act is part of the larger post-colonial struggle between liberation theology and its European counterparts. Not only is it a struggle to justify and qualify its own purpose and legitimacy to the Roman curia, but it is a larger “epistemological” position to fight for what Sousa Santos calls “cognitive justice.” Hegel’s proposal of a universal history — a history that goes from East to West — has history beginning in Asia and ending in Europe. Along the way, each successive civilization becomes a participant in the universal history of peoples, with the trajectory of human civilization meeting its ultimate end somewhere in Germany, presumably Hegel’s office. The American future is a European future: a parallel imagined community that never quite intersects within

¹³⁷ Irvine, “Liberation Theology as a Postcolonial Critique,” 147.

this progression of history. As Sousa Santos remarks, “The Hegelian idea underlies the dominant conception of the twentieth century: the European American Century...[Today] Americanization, as a hegemonic form of globalization, is thus the third act of the millennial drama of Western supremacy.”

¹³⁸ Thus, according to Hegel, there can be no history emerging from the Americas, only a history emerging from Europe. This is a truly colonial perspective if there ever was one.

This universalized history and the universal right of Enlightenment “to think” extends to everyone, presumably, but it has not been enjoyed by all. This is the “paradoxical subject-privileging” Spivak refers¹³⁹ to above and the “the colonial difference” and “epistemic privilege” Mignolo remarks¹⁴⁰ on, or the “parallel imagined community” Benedict Anderson illustrates¹⁴¹ when referring to the relationship between centers and peripheries. The question of “who can speak?” is not only central to a fundamentally post-colonial critique — or in Spivak’s case a critique of post-colonial theory — but also addresses itself to the earlier question concerning dialogical art methodologies and the application of Habermas’ notion of the “ideal speech situation” and his framing of the “public sphere,” which we will discuss in the following chapter.

¹³⁸ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Nuestra America: Reinventing a Subaltern Paradigm of Recognition and Redistribution,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 18 no. 2–3 (June 2001): 186, doi:10.1177/02632760122051706.

¹³⁹ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 275.

¹⁴⁰ Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience,” 6.

¹⁴¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 187.

Gutierrez not only argues for a subaltern who can speak, but also sees him/her operating within a unified history. His unified view of history is from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed of the Americas. His unity of history is a theological unity that extends back in time, tying historical pasts, presents, and futures with respect to the fundamental option for the unity of humanity and the divine. The option for the poor is a call to advocacy that affirms the rights of the poor to speak and to think — to secure their self-representation. And it is a personal and “eternal” decision-making process, an open option that must be made continually. It is a call to represent and assist the poor in re-presenting themselves in both senses of the term that Spivak brings up for questioning.

Liberation Theology tells us that God has opted for the poor. Gutierrez calls for the church and the Christian community to follow suit. There is a real-world urgency to make the choice, to take the option up, as it will define one’s theological production in the world within a unity of historical pasts, presents, and futures. The hermeneutic reinterpretation of the Bible and the option taken to side with them seeks to institute a new historical subjectivity for the poor and the oppressed.

Equally, the El Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino makes the argument for the historical mandate to privilege the poor in both doctrine in action by situating his argument within the Incarnation of Jesus’ life — that he was the son of God incarnate. For Sobrino and other liberation theologians, the Incarnation is

not just about Jesus becoming human. What makes it truly unique, in their view, is that the son of God became human “from below,” to use Gustavo Gutierrez’s phrase, in the sense that God became human from a position of low social standing.¹⁴² The historical concreteness of poverty is made clear through this fundamental relationship: God emerged from poverty, lived an ordinary, human life, and carried out his work amongst and on the side of the poor, at any cost.

Liberation theologians will argue that choosing God is choosing the path of the poor, and vice versa. But this unity of history is tenuous and not absolute. Every point of the decision has not been “tyrannized” by absolutism, but rather individualized as an option that must be taken again and again, as it is always available. It is a decision that must be continually made.¹⁴³ And it is a unity that emerges from the past through to the present and into the future that binds lives together within the eternal divine. This political decision against oppression is based on that praxis of action/reflection that must continually be acted upon in the context of oppression. As Irvine remarks: “In the prime instance, then, theological truth is not something beheld in philosophical theoria, but is rather a performance of agonistic practice.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Michael O’Sullivan SJ, “Reflections on the Sobrino Notification,” The Society of Jesus Online Gateway, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.jesuit.ie/content/onsite/articles/164-reflections-on-sobrino>.

¹⁴³ Irvine, “Liberation Theology as a Postcolonial Critique,” 154.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

It is within this open call to praxis that Gutiérrez's theology of liberation clearly demonstrates itself as a postcolonial critique not only of theological reason, but of epistemic privilege. It asserts a new discourse interpolating its own new subject-forming methodology and constituting a new set of social relations. As Leonardo Boff puts it, Liberation Theology is an “integral liberation” of the entire human being, political and economic as well as spiritual.¹⁴⁵ If Spivak’s argument is that the subaltern has no voice and is continually denied the possibility to have a voice in the public sphere, Liberation theology seems to be saying that she can speak.

Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM) and the frame of Violence in Medellín.

In Latin America, the period between Vatican II (1963-65) and the Medellín conference (1968) was a period of both assimilation of the teachings of Vatican II and a process of what Edward Cleary calls *Latinamericanization* which involved the development of social science centers and research on the political, social, and economic realities in the region. In preparation for the meeting, CELAM published a prepared document surveying the living standards and the

¹⁴⁵ Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation* (Melbourne, Australia: Dove Communications; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

economic and social conditions of the region and considered the role of the church in society.

The period leading up to the Medellín conference was an intense period of research and preparatory meetings. In cities like Baños, Ecuador; Mar de Plata, Argentina; Itapoan Bahia, Brazil, and others, theologians were invited to present *ponencias*, working position papers in preparation for Medellín. Each CELAM preparatory meeting had its own focus and many specialists working in national contexts were invited. Many met for the first time within this emerging international network. Most *ponencias* dealt with practical issues such as education and social action, and so much progress was made that the conference outcomes were being defined well in advance.¹⁴⁶

The CELAM conference in Medellín took place in August 1968, with the attendance of 130 Catholic bishops. One central task was the application of Vatican II to Latin America. But there were world-wide political and student-led uprisings as well as political protests and military repressions in Latin America, including the massacre of students in Tlatelolco, Mexico. Despite concerns of political instability and a wave of political assassinations around the world, Medellín opened the conference with the attendance of Pope Paul VI. The year before his arrival, Pope Paul published his *Populorum Progressio*, which

¹⁴⁶ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 34.

critiqued the international economic order, condemned an exploitative capitalistic system, and was also careful to call for development through consensus rather than political struggle.

The structure of the documents and published conclusions reflected the “see, judge, act” methodology closely, in that they began with situational assessments, then followed up with theological reflections and ended with recommendations for pastoral action. In the years following the Medellín conference, the staff at CELAM published findings and expanded the CELAM institutes. But there were many other groups that had been developing which spearheaded research, including the Priest for the Third World in Argentina, ISAL in Bolivia, the Group of Eighty in Chile, and several others.

The Medellín conference called for Christians’ involvement in the transformation of society for renovating societal changes and defended human rights while denouncing institutionalized violence and framing the concept of “structural sin.” They called for consciousness-raising evangelical work and encouraged “comunidades de base.” These documents were immensely important in the future development of the liberation movement. The final Medellín document begins with politically unambiguous language that belies the critical social science foundation of the movement and the conference as a whole:

We cannot ignore the phenomenon of this almost universal frustration of legitimate aspirations which create the climate of collective anguish in which we are already living. The lack of socio-cultural integration, in the majority of our countries, has given rise to the superimposition of cultural groups. In the economic sphere systems flourished which consider solely the potential of groups with the greatest earning power. This lack of adaptation to the characteristic and to the potentials of all our people, in turn, gives rise to frequent political instability and the consolidation of institutions that are purely formal. To all of this must be added the lack of solidarity which, on the individual and social levels, leads to the committing of serious sins, evident in the unjust structures which characterize the Latin American situation.¹⁴⁷

Latin American theologians opt for what would be called a radical social science in the United States. Dialectal social science assumes that conflicts exist in the world and may lead to systematic change. One key theoretical development, as has been stated above, was the framing of Dependency Theory as a systematic problem to be addressed on all fronts — a sort of “integral liberation,” to borrow a term from Leonardo Boff, that occurs structurally as well as personally. The whole human being, political, economic, and spiritual, must be liberated.

Dependency Theory makes the argument that the Third World has existed to create wealth for the first. The Third World cannot develop autonomously in accordance with its own needs. A progressive and gradual change will not

¹⁴⁷ CELAM, “Documento Conclusivo de Medellín.” Translation by the author.

suffice. A more radical and fundamental change is necessary to break the chains of dependency. It requires liberation on all fronts.

When Gutierrez speaks of “integral development” or liberation he speaks to it having three “reciprocally interpenetrating levels of meaning.” The first is the aspirations of the poor in what is called economic “development.” The second level of liberation is the gradual expansion of freedom and subjectivity, and the third level is the freedom that comes with communion with Christ and other humans.¹⁴⁸ He makes the argument for liberatory theology as a means of using dialectical forces inherent in Latin American discourses in this way:

More precisely, the building of a just society means the confrontation in which different kinds of violence are present between groups with different interests and opinions. The building of a just society means overcoming every obstacle to the creation of an authentic peace among people. Concretely, in Latin America this conflict revolves around the *oppression-liberation axis*.¹⁴⁹

The subject and experience of violence was not lost on either the participants or the organizers of the conference. During Medellín, the bishops called for Catholics to denounce institutionalized violence, while at the same time Colombia was emerging from a bloody period known simply as La Violencia, a ten-year (1948–58) period of civil war in Colombia between the Conservative and Liberal parties. But the violence extended before and after that period. The

¹⁴⁸ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 94.

¹⁴⁹ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 31.

violence that occurred between 1946 and 1964 resulted in over 200,000 deaths. An estimated one million people were displaced from their rural homes. As mentioned previously, CELAM 2 addresses violence often in its final documents. Often the critique of violence was brought to reflection by situating violence as one of the larger structural problems of poverty and underdevelopment:

I. The Latin American Situation and Peace

1. If "development is the new name for peace," Latin American under-development with its own characteristics in the different countries is an unjust situation which promotes tensions that conspire against peace.

We can divide these tensions into three major groups, selected, in each of these, those variables which constitute a positive menace to the peace of our countries by manifesting an unjust situation.

When speaking of injustice, we refer to those realities that constitute a sinful situation; this does not mean however, that we are overlooking the fact that at times the misery in our countries can have natural causes which are difficult to overcome.¹⁵⁰

The three major groups that comprise the tensions that conspire against peace within the Document of Medellín are titled: *TENSIONS BETWEEN CLASSES and INTERNAL COLONIALISM, INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS and EXTERNAL NEO COLONIALISM, and TENSIONS Among the COUNTRIES of LATIN AMERICA*. The first section, *TENSIONS BETWEEN CLASSES and*

¹⁵⁰ 2nd Latin American General Episcopate Council, The Church and the Latin American transformation at the Light of the Council, Document of Medellín, CELAM, Bogotá 1968.

INTERNAL COLONIALISM, covers the internal oppression one class exerts over a vast majority within a nation. *INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS and EXTERNAL NEO COLONIALISM* covers the larger colonial exploitation exercised globally by wealthier countries, while *TENSIONS Among the COUNTRIES of LATIN AMERICA* covers the friction between neighboring countries such as nationalism and armamentation. The section devoted to peace ends with a section entitled *A Christian View of Peace*, another generally called *The Problem of Violence in Latin America*, and finally *Pastoral Conclusions*.

Within this larger section, and generally within the Document of Medellín, the text speaks first and foremost of findings within the social sciences and later applies the Christian reading for their inherent injustice in order to formulate a conclusion. A close examination of this section on Peace demonstrates three specific tendencies found throughout the conference conclusions.

The first tendency is that the documents frame violence as a byproduct of the larger economic inequality found within the hemisphere. Violence seems to be seen primarily through the lens of Dependency Theory, where exploitation, due to an unequal distribution of resources, is the root cause. All three of the causes cited above are framed within this light. The radical nature of the social science research of the region, and the period, is reflected in the frame of

violence and its causes. Certain characteristics of violence of the era and the future and subsequent construction of peace are reflected upon, but only briefly.

16. As the Christian believes in the productiveness of peace in order to achieve justice, he also believes that justice is a prerequisite for peace...We should not be surprised...that the "temptation to violence" is surfacing in Latin America. One should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would not be acceptable to anyone with any degree of awareness of human rights.

17. We would like to direct our call in the first place to those who have a greater share of wealth, culture and power...we urge them not to take advantage of the pacifist position of the Church in order to oppose, either actively or passively, the profound transformations that are so necessary.

18. Also responsible for injustice are those who remain passive for fear of the sacrifice and personal risk implied by any courageous and effective action. Justice, and therefore peace, conquer by means of a dynamic action of awakening (concientization) and organization of the popular sectors, which are capable of pressing public officials who are often impotent in their social projects without popular support.¹⁵¹

This section reflects a secondary tendency found within the conference conclusions. There is a clear focus on establishing an ecclesiastical argument from the perspective of social and political critique - often being very specific and contextual. The solutions are equally and surprisingly specific action items within an ecclesiastical call for Christian unity. Under the final section of this chapter on

¹⁵¹ Document of Medellín, 1968.

peace entitled *Pastoral Conclusions*, the writers summarize their call for peace in this way:

20. In the face of the tensions which conspire against peace, and even present the temptation of violence; in the face of the Christian concept of peace which has been described, we believe that the Latin American Episcopate cannot avoid assuming very concrete responsibilities; because to create a just social order, without which peace is illusory, is an eminently Christian task.¹⁵²

This is followed up by specific actionable items including using the mass media to awaken “a living awareness of justice” and solidarity, asking for cooperation between religions, making allowances for people to “create and develop their own grassroots organizations for the redress and consolidation of their rights and the search for true justice,” addressing the ills of justice administration, bringing a halt to the arms race, and constructing a “declaration of Human Rights, to interest universities in Latin America to undertake investigations verifying the degree of its implementation in our countries,” among other concrete and specific demands. While the Document of Medellín is peppered with language referring to Christ and framing evangelical action through pastoral references and biblical footnotes, it is very specifically grounded within the social science research carried out by the variously aligned groups and newly formed research centers that made up the larger movement. The observable world, particularly in Colombia, in which violence was rampant, was

¹⁵² Ibid.

the starting point, not obscure ecclesiastical interests. In the same way, the priests in Medellín drew upon specific actions drawn from *conscientization*, the community-organizing and pedagogical work being exercised throughout the various “grassroots organizations” that had been operating for nearly a decade throughout Latin America. Interestingly enough, with reference to violence, the document makes no mention of religious or spiritually motivated Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs); rather, it speaks of the general importance of developing “grassroots organizations” (*organizaciones de base*) in addressing social justice issues.

The third and final tendency is the overarching macro societal view of the effects and causes of violence and the strategies to bring about its end. What is lacking almost entirely is any concrete consideration in how to heal its already existent effects in people. There is no consideration of how those same “grassroots organizations” could aid in memory recuperation for those who have been displaced or who have suffered trauma and no interest in how the “integration” that is mentioned in purely economic terms can in fact be a form of civic reintegration and healing, or how the dialogical platform of education and *conscientization* can be the basis for post-violence community work.

The connection between dialogical methods of community work and evangelization and their intrinsic ties to the Social Sciences within Liberation

Theology creates the framework for us to begin to work towards pedagogy and art practices that follow the same methodological line of work.

The following chapter will investigate the dialogical work of Paulo Friere and the subject-object dialectic of his dialogical learning process, better known as *conscientização* or roughly translated as “consciousness raising” in English. The chapter will attempt to better understand how the political and theoretical shifts that arose from Liberation Theology worked in tandem with the pedagogical advances made at this time in Latin America by tracing their collective advances towards a more critical understanding and position around dialogue as a communal and creative act of solidarity and political subject building.

Chapter 3

The communicative “praxis” and dialogical exchange in education

To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it... Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming.

- Paolo Freire ¹⁵³

Chapter one introduced the language of colonialism and post-colonial theories and their relationship to cultural practices. It introduced a brief history of the development of post-coloniality and its evolution from one centered on socialist state-development towards a textual critique based on post-structural interests and its deep suspicion of Marxism. This shift was reflective of a larger shift within social theory that traced its development to Kantian aesthetic theory, Hegel and Schiller through the textual paradigm of post-structuralism. Finally, we introduced Freire’s notion of praxis and his framing of dialogical learning in response to the autonomous space of aesthetic theory.

Chapter two began with a history of Catholic Church’s development of postulations leading to Rome’s Concilio Vaticano II (1962-65) and the subsequent birth of Liberation Theology in Latin America.

¹⁵³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

The need for Lay communities' involvement and the development of social science theories opened up theology to new forms of seeing their context within a larger structure of development, history and politics. Also the need for actualizing and conscientizing the base communities in the region led to experimental forms of teaching and learning. These methods and the political urgencies of the period, expressed both within and without the Catholic Church led to the seminal events in the CELAM II conference in Medellin, 1968 and the practical/theoretical formalization of Liberation Theology.

Liberation Theology has been undoubtedly influential, but it has also been unfairly relegated to the "political" spectrum of Catholic theological doctrine, meaning that it has historically been accused of simply being politics, that it did not contribute unique ecclesiastical perspectives. The intellectual community that supported the movement, both within the Church and without, went to great lengths to create the theological support and to distance itself from accusations of being Marxist sympathizers. Scholars like Gustavo Gutierrez truly felt that their primary contribution was an expansion, democratization, and decolonization of Christian theology.

The priests and the contemporary artists, whom today seem to follow similar methodological paths share the same concern: they are both accused of working primarily in politics when in fact they are working in their respective

fields: theology and art. They might be criticized for having a political urgency to their practice, they were both working in more cultural and imaginative realms that extended beyond the political effects of their practice. Ultimately both parties, separated by decades and disciplines, are looking to find new ways to use dialogue with local communities while upending ossified theoretical models and institutional structures.

This is not to say that this form of art practice requires one to leave art. In fact I would contend that it requires a new theoretical model of action that is, in many ways, still academic in its space of debate and operation, but not emerging from what is currently being taught as the canon of art theory. At the same time, it and is questioning the research models of academia. This need for an “expanded art” analysis is the most urgent task within the field.

This chapter will begin by investigating the work of Paolo Freire and the subject-object dialectic of his dialogical learning process, better known as *conscientização*. It will also look at the pedagogical context that Freire was working in and the popular education movement that helped define his practice. We will then follow with a comparative analysis of Friere and Habermas’ speech situations and their foundations on dialogical educational structures. Finally, we will invoke Sousa Santos’s critique of Habermas and the universalism of Critical Theory to frame the relationship between theory and practice. It will conclude

with a case study of the work of Pablo Sanaguano and his work with Kichwa communities in the highlands of Ecuador where he applies his knowledge of liberation theology's pedagogical strategies.

* * *

Before 1983, literacy was a prerequisite for voting in Brazil, and when Paulo Freire began working in the early 1960s, 15 of the 25 million people in Brazil were illiterate.¹⁵⁴ The changes he helped enact were impressive and vital in expanding political subjectivity in Brazil. The implications of his teaching and methods, as we know now, are worldwide. After the 1964 coup in Brazil, he was arrested twice, spent 75 days in jail, and was forced into exile for 16 years (1964 - 1980). His first major publication, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, appeared in 1967 in Brazil where he outlines his main theoretical and methodological perspectives. Friere's publication introduced the concept of *conscientization*¹⁵⁵ and the social science perspective of social and economic analysis in line with what was coterminously being framed as "dependency theory." After his exile from Brazil, he travelled to Bolivia and to Chile, where he became involved with agrarian reform movements. He subsequently left for

¹⁵⁴ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Most often translated to English as *consciousness raising*.

Harvard in 1969. His most important book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), was not published in Brazil, due to censorship, for another 5 years.

If the theory of Freire's pedagogy is most often associated with the social context of Latin America during this period, it can often be traced back to the ontological framing and methodological application of what he understood and defined as *praxis*. That definition has many influences and theoretical lineages, but it is fundamentally based on Hegel's critique of Kant's *subject-object dialectic* — the relationship between the subject (knower) and the object (external world). Hegel understood these acts of cognition as being embedded in social relationships that begin in self-other interactions: "Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it *is* only by being acknowledged or "recognized."¹⁵⁶ Isolated individuals do not perform the quality of consciousness, it arises and exists through mutual recognition. This dynamic is demonstrated in Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic: "the one is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself; the other is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another. The former is the Master, or Lord, the latter the Bondsman."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 175.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

In this case, the master has a narcissistic and illusory power over the slave, who in turn has a universal and profound understanding of freedom that the master cannot understand. The relationship is, in fact, one of dependency and subordination. Leo Rauch points out that this relationship, according to Hegel, often leaves out a dynamic found in his earlier writings (Jena Lectures, 1806) that sees this ongoing interaction as based on mutual recognition, rather than solely based on conflict: “Hegel speaks of *Anerkannsteyn*, or ‘being recognized,’ as the ‘immediate’ reality of the objective mind. This is also the most fundamental element in personhood, for to be recognized as person is to exist as person.”¹⁵⁸

This basis of recognition is contrasted with Marx’s perspective, which sees the Master-Slave dialectic as a metaphor of the divided class society that results from the capitalist exploitation of labor. Because its commodification can only result in the alienation of that same labor, only revolutionary consciousness can create a society that abolishes class divisions. The critique of Marx has always been that his methods were in fact, most usable as critiques, as theoretical discussions of dialectic reversals, not methodological roadmaps to follow. As numerous critics have pointed out, Marx was immensely successful at creating a “negative social psychology,”¹⁵⁹ meaning that his influence was in pointing out

¹⁵⁸ Leo Rauch, “From Jena to Heidelberg: Two Views of Recognition,” in *Hegel’s Philosophy of Spirit*, ed. Peter G. Stillman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 50.

¹⁵⁹ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 24.

those factors - such as the theory of labor's alienation - that inhibited the development of autonomous subjects. He was not successful in outlining or even identifying the process of learning by which such transformation could happen. This failure to deal with the pedagogical process by which emancipation could be situated and grounded ultimately opened the door for an anti-democratic "dictatorship of the proletariat" in which revolutionary elites were to bring that awareness to the masses from the top-down.

Many of the "neo-Marxist" Frankfurt School thinkers attempted to consider these issues more profoundly. Paul Connerton summarizes the critique of the major figures of the Frankfurt School and their research in the "method by which systems of social constraints became internalized."¹⁶⁰ Research into the culture industry and political propaganda, for example, found its way deep into personal relationships and conflicts to create "artificial" needs or support certain political systems. Researchers like Marcuse investigated the allure of the commodity-form in affluent capitalism and the social constraints it generated. The Frankfurt School's many other areas of research and the numerous contributions are undeniable, but the inability to tie these insights to any form of actual socio-political movement or to have it anchored in social struggle was telling. It was perhaps, as many theorists have indicated, post-war disillusionment that had

¹⁶⁰ Paul Connerton, *The Tragedy of Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 134. As cited in Michael R. Welton, "The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory," in *In Defense of Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*, ed. Michael R. Welton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 24.

many thinkers occupying what Lukacs called the “Grand Hotel Abyss.” The concern with the relationships between theory and practice, and ultimately the central importance of learning and dialogue, would later be addressed by another Frankfurt School figure named Jürgen Habermas.

Scholars Carlos Alberto Torres and Raymond Allen Morrow outline a convincing argument for the interconnected projects of Freire and Habermas. According to Torres and Morrow, their social theory is grounded in responding to the master-slave dialect and Marx’s theory of praxis. They fundamentally converge:

On subordinating the master-slave dialectic of struggle within a more encompassing theory of praxis as mutual recognition in communicative dialogue...The importance of this shift from mutual recognition as part of a subject-object paradigm of death struggle to mutual recognition as an inter-subjective process involving both conflict and reconciliation becomes apparent in [their] respective interpretations of Hegel and Marx.¹⁶¹

Freire is concerned with what might be called dialogical hermeneutics - a concern in correctly framing the concept of mutual recognition. More importantly, his focus on love and solidarity comes from his Christian beliefs and his early work in Brazilian popular education movements.

¹⁶¹ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 25.

If what characterizes the oppressed is their subordination to the consciousness of the master, as Hegel affirms, true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these "beings for another." The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce.¹⁶²

This extended framing of a praxis invested in taking the option for the poor and oppressed and creating solidarity built on action should be seen within the rich political and pedagogical context of Freire's development as a thinker. What we can surmise clearly at this point is that his view of praxis is not based on Marx's "monological" struggle between a subject and an object - a definition that is primarily based on Marx's own views on labor. Rather, Freire bases praxis on a dialogical and intersubjective "philosophy of consciousness" and solidarity. Freire's path to a theory of praxis lies, therefore, in a "dialogical learning process" that places concrete human experiences, local struggles, and movements at the center of agency building, where participants articulate unique "utopian visions from within their own unique life-histories."¹⁶³

¹⁶² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50.

¹⁶³ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 29.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968 and translated into English in 1970, Freire defines his key term praxis - acts that shape and change the world – by invoking the singular interconnected term "action-reflection."¹⁶⁴ Freire sees that separating the concurrent processes is to create a dichotomy that is akin to separating theory from practice. The reflective and dialogical component within his pedagogical methodology is inseparable from action. Theoretical reflection gives social action its purpose. Furthermore, praxis and our possibility to achieve it, is what that defines us as human, and as subjects – not objects – in the world capable of transforming reality.¹⁶⁵

If praxis, simply put, is learning by a cyclical reflection on experience, then the first act according to Freire, must be one that “risks an act of love” or solidarity and commitment. This praxis therefore has roots with the Hegelian dialectic but is also the result of the concern for solidarity and “commitment” present in Existentialism. This falls in line with the perspective of liberation theologians who say that the first action of theology is doing justice in action. As they would say, praxis does not happen behind seminary walls. The class analysis that defines both the liberatory church and Freire’s work makes the first step the “option for the poor” - choosing solidarity, taking sides, identification and advocacy.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 75.

¹⁶⁵ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 34.

¹⁶⁶ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 65.

One important corollary of praxis is that learning or conscientization can only happen when it is part of a cycle of testing out newly acquired knowledge. Conscientization or *conscientização* is most often associated with Paulo Freire's adult literacy project, which prioritizes "revealing the mechanisms of social domination" that allows oppressed communities the ability to become *conscious* of the causes of that domination. The education process typically focused on participatory research and learning through the local context - literacy projects equally focused on lived experiences. The development of a reflection/action praxis towards transformation of personal and social contexts attempted to develop alternatives to hegemonic processes and narratives. As scholars have noted, Freire's central concern in adult education was not about outlining a pedagogical discipline, per se, but about developing a method by which education could be used in a political application and advocacy for the poor in their lived contexts.

For Freire, adult education constitutes a pedagogy for social transformation. He also saw *conscientização* as a form of "cultural action." He had little use for education that was not centered on the foundation that it must make participants aware of the freedom available in the world. It must open humanity to its possibilities and choices - the options that must be weighed critically. In Freire's model, there was no need for schools or classrooms, or even teachers. They were to be replaced with *circulos de cultura* and co-ordinators

who facilitated dialogue about “concrete situations” in the life of the “student.”

The teacher is to begin by learning about the popular worldview from the community in which s/he is to work, not as an imposition from above. As Freire said: “This teaching cannot be done from top down, but from the inside outside, by the illiterate himself, with the collaboration of the educator.”¹⁶⁷

Freire argues against existing pedagogical models that he called “banking education,” in which teachers would “deposit” isolated and ahistorical data into the minds of students. Freire felt that the teacher is at the same time a student and the student is a teacher as long as education “involves the dialectical and reciprocal production of knowledge, not simply the depositing of information.” His method emerged as a critique of traditional, hierarchical and authoritarian models of education.¹⁶⁸

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors—teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction to be resolved. Dialogical relations—indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object—are otherwise impossible.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 45.

¹⁶⁸ Carlos Alberto Torres, “Participatory Action Research and Popular Education in Latin America,” in *Critical Theory and Educational Research*, eds. Peter L. McLaren and James M. Giarelli, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). 238.

¹⁶⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

This position of horizontality with the student means that in order to engage in real dialogue, the teacher must understand and empathize with the worldview of the student with whom s/he is working. We will remember that this position of co-participation within the learning and teaching process had strong supporters within liberation theology and the working methodology that was proposed for the clergy in their work with the laity and the oppressed communities they worked with. One need only recall some of the earlier models of base community organizing happening in France, Belgium or Brazil to understand that this model was being explored in other similar arenas. This co-participation or collaboration has strong theological implications for both teacher and student, not only in removing the hierarchy, but in linking their liberation to one another. Towards this position of collaboration, Gutierrez stated the following:

The praxis of evangelization of the masses led to what we began a few years ago to call 'two-way evangelization'. The expression is a faltering one, but it expresses a profound reality: in seeking to bring the good news to the poor, one has a real experience of being evangelized by the poor themselves. This experience brought us to an understanding that it is the poor themselves who evangelize. And it gave a brand-new meaning to the maxim that God reveals himself in history through the poor.¹⁷⁰

The reading here is that the poor are evangelists because God liberates them as they liberate themselves. Gutiérrez has learned, by witnessing their own

¹⁷⁰ Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 105.

self-liberation, that he was being evangelized by the poor. He was learning from them. For liberation theologians, this unbreakable link - a humanistic model that folds itself into the social sciences in Latin America at the time - begins with the understanding that the hierarchies that were being challenged within education and theology were not only symbolic or metaphorical; this co-labor was the core and uncompromising foundation for praxis itself.

Returning to Freire, we begin to see a similar methodology being formalized. The language to be used in his literacy methods were everyday words used among the community, not highly specialized language. Words like *favela* (shanty town), *comida* (food), *terreno* (plot of land), and *patrão* (boss) were everyday vocabulary that the student would recognize in daily life and, as such, would be a part of any pictorial or linguistic learning situation. Forms of creative reimagining - often through generative word exercises - were put into place, and students began to question their (re)definitions and relations. This reimagining was the source material for analyzing what Freire called the “existential situations” introduced by critical teaching. The identification of these ‘situations’ are part of a model often referred to within critical pedagogy as “thematic investigations,” where the object is to “construct generative themes or expressions” that result from oppressed groups reflecting on their concerns and needs. Students begin to consider life as it is, and as it could be - a form of

critical consciousness-raising as both class knowledge and practice that constitutes the subjective conditions for ongoing social transformation.¹⁷¹

Central to Freire's thinking was the understanding that praxis - the process by which action and reflection are intertwined - is a distinctive human quality and has certain fundamental characteristics. It is fundamentally a communicative process of naming. Freire says, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it."¹⁷² But as noted above, praxis is not a monological experience – it is intersubjective and dialogical. He says:

The thinking Subject cannot think alone. In the act of thinking about the object s/he cannot think without the co-participation of another Subject. There is no longer an "I think" but "we think." It is the "we think" which established the "I think" and the contrary. This co-participation of the Subjects in the act of thinking is communication. Thus the object is not the end of the act of communication, but the mediator of communication... Communication implies a reciprocity which cannot be broken. Hence it is not possible to comprehend thought without its double function, as something which learns and something which communicates.¹⁷³

Freire's dialogue is a fundamental human experience in subjective development. To put it broadly, it is a developmental ontology that is a central feature of social life. Dialogue exists because prospective agents choose an interaction based on a form of empathy and trust: "Whereas faith in humankind is

¹⁷¹ Torres, "Participatory Action Research," 238.

¹⁷² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

¹⁷³ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 122.

an *a priori* requirement for dialogue, trust is established by dialogue.” Freire wrote a great deal about dialogue not being able to exist without hope and without a “climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in naming the world.”¹⁷⁴

But it is important at this point to return to the issue of oppression and how language – in this case dialogue – is not only central to resisting oppression, but embodies the very ontological nature of a historical process

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them...If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.¹⁷⁵

Freire often contrasted language and actions in terms of “dialogical” verses “anti-dialogical.” Actions that are anti-dialogical are those that rupture the relations of empathy because they are hierarchical and oppressive.¹⁷⁶ The anti-dialogical is analogous to banking systems of education in that they are non-communicative deposits of information. This system is contrasted to the

¹⁷⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 91.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁷⁶ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 38.

dialogically driven problem-posing method in which learning is “constituted and organized by the students' view of the world, where their own generative themes are found.”¹⁷⁷ The anti-dialogical is also analogous to conquest, as it reproduces the relations of domination and what he termed the struggle for *humanization* and against *dehumanization*, both uncompleted processes that must be opted for continually.

Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness. But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation... This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed...

Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 109.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

Freire is often accused of being existentialist, and the humanistic quality of his language must be tempered by the fact that he does not argue for an ideal human being rooted in some idyllic past, but is creating a platform for intersubjective and decolonized knowledge production, one that is about actual and lived political realities. His educational platform argues for a continual resistance against anti-dialogical actions that have the effect of dehumanizing both the oppressors as well as the oppressed. The method he argues for is an open-ended and incomplete process that calls for humanizing process to be continually realized and opted for.

Freire encouraged people to be active participants in their own education and learning process as well as making major democratic decisions about that process. In keeping with the goal of the unity of theory and practice, if the goal of education was to help students “reflect on their own capacity to reflect,” then the model itself must allow the poor to define their own destiny and become “agents of their own history.” Freire reflects on critical consciousness in the following way:

The first level of apprehension of reality is the “prise de conscience”...however it is not yet critical consciousness. There is the deepening...critical development of the “prise de conscience.” For this reason, critical consciousness implies the surpassing of the spontaneous sphere of apprehension of reality by a critical position through this criticism, reality appears to be a “cognoscente objectum” within which man assumes as epistemological position: man looking for knowing. Thus, critical consciousness is a test of environment, a test of reality. To the extent that as we are

conscientizing, we are unveiling reality we are penetrating the phenomenological essence of the object that we are trying to analyze. Thus, critical consciousness means historical consciousness. In the last analysis, class consciousness is not psychological consciousness. Nor does it mean class sensitiveness. Class consciousness has a strong identity with class knowledge. But as it happens, knowledge does not naturally exist as such.¹⁷⁹

Freire is the most important intellectual to stimulate new pedagogical methods in popular education, particularly in Brazil between 1958 and 1964, the year his exile began. Although Freire was influenced by Catholicism and was a Catholic himself, he rarely worked with the Church in Brazil until his return from exile in the late 1970s. His immense influence within religious circles lies in the teaching methods he advocated with the poor, which resonated and worked adjacently with those being developed within leftist Catholicism. It must be remembered that although Freire saw knowledge as a dialectic of oppositions, he did not support the idea that education should lead to outright political revolution. He believed that radical political change was necessary, but he also believed that liberty and agency amongst the poor – respect for their knowledge – was paramount. Despite the many right-wing claims that his model of education was about Marxist indoctrination (an accusation he shared with liberation theology as a whole), his call for popular participation and democratic inclusion fundamentally conflicted with the Leninist model of transformation through centralized decision-

¹⁷⁹ Paulo Freire and Institut d'action culturelle, eds., *Vivendo e aprendendo: Experiências do IDAC em educação popular* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980), 74, cited in Torres, "Participatory Action Research," 238.

making.¹⁸⁰ In many ways, this important distinction made it possible for a hierarchical Church to adopt Freire's model in certain areas without threatening its fundamental identity as a centralized institution.¹⁸¹

It is also important to note that Freire was not working alone. His work has seen an increase in popularity in recent years and so it may be easy to forget that the literacy movement was part of a more general "popular education" movement carried out by numerous organizations in order to develop a critical position amongst the popular classes. The central characteristic of these efforts, whether it was carried out by the church, universities, or the state, was to respect popular culture and ancestral as well as daily acquired knowledge in an effort to overcome the paternalistic outcomes of previous groups.

The most influential teaching programs adopted by the Church were the Paulo Freire Method and those by the Movement for Grassroots Education (MEB). Scholars have argued that Freire and MEB were as influential in the

¹⁸⁰ The framing of liberatory pedagogy today in United States is often done through the lens of John Dewey, who believed in "shaping a vital common national experience" and that schools' primary function is to help students become "good citizens in the broadest sense." This idea lies in contrast to decolonial thinking, which according to thinkers like Walter Mignolo is about going beyond the national frame. Dewey is a Pragmatist, which, according to Stanley Fish, "is the philosophy not of grand ambitions but of little steps" - very different from the revolutionary discourse of Freire and ultimately of Liberation Theology. Dewey's emphasis on adult education poses the individual as responsible for his/her own continuing education throughout his/her own life. It is not a concerted focus on the structural inequalities within society. See Thomas Deans, "Service-Learning in Two Keys: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 6, issue 1 (1999), 15–29.

¹⁸¹ Scott Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil, 1916–1985* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 70.

transformation of the Brazilian Church as other politically motivated Christian groups, such as Juventude Universidade Católica (JUC) or Ação Popular (AP). But unlike those two groups, both MEB and Freire were less concerned with developing ecclesiastical or theoretical positions and more concerned with social transformation and working with the poor. Their contribution to the Church resulted from developing new ways of operating with the working classes.¹⁸²

Equally important were ecclesiastical organizations such as the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), which set about making reforms to the Catholic Church. Between 1955 and 1964 – the year of the military coup – CNBB was the most important force for reform in the Church. It began a number of grassroots programs that reduced clerical control and increased lay involvement. The most important changes came through the development of social programs that implemented the Church's social doctrine, including the Natal Movement for adult education, the Foundation Leo XIII and the Cruzada São Sebastião. The latter two were particularly involved in educational programs in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

MEB began in 1961 with an agreement between the government and the Church. The State would provide the financing, and the Church would carry out the educational programming in country's least developed regions. By 1962,

¹⁸² Ibid., 66.

MEB had taken a firmer political position in favor of a more radical social transformation. Their central tenet during this period was that people needed to be agents of their own history; they put their energies towards *conscientização* efforts. One document states, “to do honest, meaningful, and coherent work, it is necessary that the common person be the agent of the necessary transformation.”¹⁸³ This position, one of many that began to push for greater lay and community roles than the Church had incorporated up to that point, clearly anticipated Freire’s and the Church’s pedagogical strategies.

For his part, Freire began to develop his methodology while at the University at Recife in the late 1950s. He further developed his work in the early 1960s while director of the Cultural Extension Service of the same university, at the same time that MEB, local student groups and other popular education programs emerged. Some of these efforts were strongly affiliated with one another, while others were offshoots of previous efforts. As a specialized section of Catholic Action, JUC was highly influential in moving student action and promoting university as well as political reform. The União Nacional dos Estudantes (UNE), many of whose members were also part of JUC, organized national seminars and ran the Centros de Cultura Popular (CPCs) that engaged in political and educational work with the masses in urban areas as well as the countryside. Although JUC and their CPCs failed to achieve the long-standing

¹⁸³ Movimento de Educação de Base, *MEB em Cinco Anos, 1961–1966* (Rio de Janeiro, 1966), 16. Cited in Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil*, 67.

changes they hoped for within society and the university, they did establish a practice of critique/action – a praxis – which drove students, Catholic and non-Catholic alike out of their milieu and into the community and wider society. Projects ranged from literacy programs to collective research projects wherein members of communities would engage in collective research guided by a researcher concerning local problems and societal dynamics. By setting up organizations, workshops and other structures that bridged the university with the world outside it, they created the links that brought action to education and education to action.¹⁸⁴

As Carlos Alberto Torres points out, the various lines of competing pedagogies of liberation that developed in the context of adult education in Latin America at this time proved to be vital instruments in developing social consciousness in “diverse experiments” within transitions to socialism, as in the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua. Today, some refer to this process of discursive knowledge production or collective investigations as *participatory action research* (PAR), which combines research, educational work and social action.¹⁸⁵ Its characteristics, evolved from the dialogical learning practices used by Freire and the Church, are formed from social science studies of actual living conditions.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Emanuel J. De Kadt, *Catholic Radicals in Brazil* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 69.

¹⁸⁵ Participatory action research (PAR) are sets of methodologies and platforms that take on different names and even varying parameters, depending on the disciplinary launching point and who is framing the research.

¹⁸⁶ Torres, “Participatory Action Research,” 243.

Pablo Latapi argues that in addition to the various groups and organizations that developed in Brazil, participatory methodologies in Latin America as a whole also developed within a competitive climate of various alternative pedagogical models advanced by various groups, including ideas around “action research” proposed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, the co-founder of CLACSO (Latin American Social Science Council) at the end of the sixties. The methodology around “militant research” was represented in IDAC (Institute for Cultural Action), an institute founded by Freire and other Brazilian exiles in Geneva and promoted by Miguel and Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira. Militant research was also investigated methodologically by another group formed in 1968 in Geneva at the same time, La Rosca Foundation for Social Research, founded in part by Fals Borda before formalizing its activities in Bogotá the following year. In summary, these pedagogical experiments – the origins of participatory action research – are indebted to Freire’s contribution as well as to the dynamic social and political conditions of the 1960s in Latin America beginning with the post-colonial movement that found a concrete action in the Cuban Revolution.

Action Research models (CLACSO, IDAC, and Rosca Foundation, for example) directly challenged many of the same issues that were being investigated by the left-leaning institutions linked to the Church in Latin America, many of which are mentioned above. They emerged at the same time as the crisis of economic policies of import substitution and land reform during the 60’s

and 70's and were equally critical of the modernization and developmental theories supported by the ruling classes and the United States. These models were instrumental in also challenging established models of traditional social sciences and the educational implications of that methodology and framework.

Education, seen from a more wider/popular perspective, was more than just a means to address illiteracy in Latin America. As noted in an earlier chapter, the historic lack of infrastructure and the immense class inequalities and dispersed opportunities for education (and faith-based learning was no exception) were a challenge for the region as a whole. If the subaltern could not speak, it was due, in great part, to the traditional educational models that existed to reinforce the interests of those who could speak. Liberation Pedagogy and the Action Research models that developed coterminously with the literacy campaigns supported by Freire's methodology were concrete attempts to create a space for the oppressed to have a say in their own education and have a voice in their own social and political welfare.

There are obviously many challenges to implementing a Freirian model of education. Not all of his proposals are possible in present-day political conditions. The role of the teacher, as noted before, is paramount and there are huge differences between a teacher's role in a highly bureaucratized and often centralized school system in which the teacher is responsible for evaluating

student's progress and maintaining discipline in the classroom, and a Freirian model where a facilitator is working with adults in an informal and consensual setting.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the implications of Freirian models for popular education are important; such models undermine and challenge the power of curriculum experts as well as state bureaucracies to control what is being learned and how it assesses success.

* * *

In the early years of the last decade we witnessed well-documented financial collapses throughout the hemisphere as well as a social and cultural crisis arising from the same neoliberal economic policies. We also witnessed a resurgence in the pedagogically driven models of collective and decolonial art practices. At the same time, we have seen an even broader increase in the privatization model of both financial sectors and the education sector. Why was there a preference for a market monopoly system over the state monopoly with regards to education? Neoliberal preference for market-driven solutions is seemingly well-known; basically, the neoliberal argument is that markets respond more quickly to technical and social demands. Markets are more efficient and supposedly have higher levels of accountability for social investment than do their state-driven bureaucratic counterparts. The central complaint by neoliberal

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 240.

theorists has been that interest groups exploit society through the political system by siphoning out public funds in the form of entitlements, welfare payments, and subsidies. Neo-liberalism views economic development in the Third World as imitative, needing to “catch up” with the West by adopting its liberal-capitalist democratic system. This notion that identical socio-economic models can, and should, be applied unconditionally throughout the peripheries of the globe in an attempt to mimic the metropolises is worthy of a reminder from Benedict Anderson on the foundations of colonialism:

What is startling in the American namings of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries is that “new” and “old” were understood synchronically, coexisting within homogenous, empty time. Vizcaya is there *alongside* Nueva Vizcaya, New London *alongside* London: an idiom of sibling competition rather than of inheritance.

This new synchronic novelty could arise historically only when substantial groups of people were in a position to think of themselves as living lives *parallel* to those of other substantial groups of people - if never meeting, yet certainly proceeding along the same trajectory...

For this sense of parallelism or simultaneity not merely to arise, but to have vast political consequences, it was necessary for the distance between the parallel groups to be large, and the newer of them be substantial in size and permanently settled, as well as firmly subordinated to the older. These conditions were met in the Americas as they had never been before.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 187–88.

The notion of parallel development through obligation conjures up the image of trajectories that never meet but attempt to follow the same path, one mimicking the other in its effort to catch up. The argument to adopt, by force if necessary, a globalized and World Bank-sanctioned liberal-capitalist democratic system is already enforced. The wrinkle here is that liberal democracy, free markets and democracy are so entirely intertwined so as to be indistinguishable one from the other.¹⁸⁹ Hence it is argued, quite easily, that political control over economy and resources should be phased out in favor of private initiatives and enterprises.

The question being asked is, are privatization policies a way to increase competition, thereby making things more streamlined, or are they simply a way of replacing one monopoly (state) with another (private business)? In terms of educational policies, neoliberalism has opted for a combination of approaches, all of them represented by the guidelines of the World Bank.

Two specific policies were simultaneously promoted by the educational agendas of the World Bank: a prioritization of basic education and an emphasis on the quality of that education. In his 1999 study of education policy in Buenos Aires, Jose Luis Coraggio demonstrated that the final objective of the World Bank educational policy – drafted by economists, not educators - was “economic

¹⁸⁹ Antony Kalliath, “Re-Visiting Liberation Theology in a Neo-Liberal World” (paper presented at the Liberation Theology Forum, Catholic University, Louvain, Belgium, 2007).

efficiency, liberalization of markets, and globalization of capital.” These priorities have the consequence of over-privileging quantitative methods of measuring that success based on economic criteria. The conclusions reached were that it was a better financial investment - meaning there was a higher financial return understood by an increase in the gross national product – to invest in primary education over any other level of educational investment.¹⁹⁰ Education is being re-formed to become a part of national economic policy. It is being defined both as a problem, when it fails to supply a flexible workforce with the necessary new skill set to keep the U.S. competitive, while at the same time it is being framed as the solution by “upgrading” those skill sets and improving our national earnings. Productivity is the driving factor, and everyone is expected to pull their weight: individuals, institutions (i.e. school boards), communities, and on up the line, are expected to meet international benchmarks, regardless of context or living conditions.

If education is being tied to economic and productivity gains, education policy and policy production across many parts of the world are being more tightly controlled by the state to the exclusion of local and regional groups, stakeholders (like educators), and oppressed minority groups. Accountability and performance management are one way control of education is being maintained

¹⁹⁰ Carlos Alberto Torres, “Education, Power, and the State: Successes and Failures of Latin American Education in the Twentieth Century,” in *The International Handbook on the Sociology of Education: An International Assessment of New Research and Theory*, eds. Carlos Alberto Torres and Ari Antikainen, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 273.

and moved away from “autonomous local units.” The emphasis has shifted from process outcomes and from the intrinsic value of education to its instrumental use, as defined by neo-liberal agendas.¹⁹¹

Understanding contemporary art’s pedagogical and philosophical predecessors is important in understanding the actual crisis that is the emerging privatization of our educational system – a trend that Latin America has not escaped. If there is something to be taken away from the dialogically-driven community-based art practices that are currently garnering so much attention, it is that two giants for cognitive and social justice, Freire and Gutierrez, loom large over this horizon of practices. We must also see the relationship between the globalization and neo-liberalization of education and learning as an additional framework for analysis of contemporary artworks whose pedagogical and education praxis naturally resist these trends on various levels.

Freire and Habermas’ intersubjective theories of dialogical rationalities

Another central figure whose work influenced both Freire and Gutierrez was the German Frankfurt School theorist Jürgen Habermas. So much has been

¹⁹¹ Jill Blackmore, “Globalization: A Useful Concept for Feminists Rethinking Theory and Strategies in Education?” in *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Nicholas C. Burbules and Carlos Alberto Torres (New York: Routledge, 2000), 134.

written on his life and work that there is no need to recap it here. What I will do is summarize established uses of Habermas' theory – specifically, those by Freire – that can be instrumental in theorizing contemporary social practice art projects in Latin America.

Theorist Michael Welton points out that the Frankfurt School left a large unattended “missing link” within critical theory by failing to inquire the relationship between theory and practice. How was education and learning within adults used, potentially within moments of social and political crises, in order to create new, more democratic institutions while developing individual and collective skills and understanding for self-determination? Did critical theory help create a community of historical agents? How can critical theory prove the importance of fundamental social change when it seemingly has no anchor in actual social struggles? Habermas understood that within Marx, one could no longer address the proletariat as a “singular transformative agent.” He began to place education and dialogically-based learning processes at the center of his critical work, which prompts Welton to ask if this “learning turn” introduced by Habermas was not only a major shift, but a revolution within the development of social theory?¹⁹²

Despite the fact that the Frankfurt School rarely left the European continent for models for how to address universal concerns, we should attempt to

¹⁹² Welton, “The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory,” 26.

understand it from that same (eurocentric) position and see how important that “turn” was to continental social theory. Habermas’ “learning turn” is most understood through his elaboration of his *theory of communicative action* where he outlines for a “universal pragmatism.” His argument is that language and “all communication reveals fundamental structural properties that transcend cultural and historical differences.”¹⁹³

Habermas cites the importance of Kant in attempting to develop a universal foundation for democracy and its institutions but also points out that Kant failed in his goal. Habermas’ argument is that Kant and others have failed because they concentrated on what he called “the philosophy of the subject.”¹⁹⁴ Habermas argued for the importance of maintaining the need for a universal philosophy by warning against the dangers of abandoning such a (universal) project; relativism and contextualism were real dangers. His argument, much like Freire’s, is not to abandon the goal of constituting society rationally, but to focus on intersubjectivity. His theory of discourse ethics, located within his theory of communicative action, places the weight of such a project on dialogue. He believes that the process of reaching mutual understanding through dialogue, what he calls “communicative rationality,” is universal because it is an unavoidable and central experience in human life. Under conditions he calls

¹⁹³ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 40.

¹⁹⁴ Bent Flyvbjerg, “Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society?” *The British Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (1998): 212.

“ideal speech situations,” decision making is guided by reason and trust, not coercion. Superior arguments based on facts and goodwill will lead us to a consensus-building, reciprocal understanding and coordinated action.

Much like Freire, whose theory outlines two forms of communication, dialogical and anti-dialogical, Habermas makes a distinction between “strategic action” and “communicative action.” And in much the same vein, he suggests a dialectic where the democratizing potential of one is continually threatened by the anti-democratic domination of the other. Communicative action is about consensus building and intersubjective understanding, while strategic action is oriented towards technical administrative success and control. Key within this process is the notion of a consensus proposal without the use of force, called a validity claim. Validity claims are contested norms whose goal of acceptance and consensus are processed through a principle called “discourse ethics.” The ultimate goal of raising validity claims and submitting them to the rigors of this discursive process is the shared desire for recognition and understanding amongst the participants.¹⁹⁵

Brent Flyvberg highlights Habermas’ five key processual requirements of discourse ethics to ensure validity and truth. The following is a model for taking part in a public debate: 1) no party or group that is affected by what is being

¹⁹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 17.

discussed can be excluded from the conversation; 2) all participants should have equal ability to present and critique validity claims; 3) participants must be able and willing to empathize with each other's validity claims; 4) existing power differences between participants have to be neutralized so that they do not effect the consensus building effort; and 5) participants must openly be transparent about their goals and intentions and refrain from strategic action.¹⁹⁶

Given these first five requirements, Flyvbjerg goes on to add a sixth of his own: unlimited time. Nancy Fraser and other critics have rightly criticized Habermas for his concept of a liberal public sphere that does not address or assumes a great deal of who actually has access to the debate.¹⁹⁷ For Habermas, the "ideal speech situation" attempts to bracket off social differences in class, gender, ethnicity and education, giving priority to the strength of the "better argument"; nevertheless, it does not address the language skills necessary to participate or the ability of many sectors of the public living under poor conditions to participate. Given the extensive time requirements, there is a certain luxury in doing so. Sousa Santos sees a fundamental Eurocentricity in the conception of the public sphere. By assuming a separation between the state and civil society, it frames the "bourgeois citizen and his public sphere as external to the structure of power...political action consists of political discussion,

¹⁹⁶ Flyvbjerg, "Habermas and Foucault," 213.

¹⁹⁷ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56, accessed July 1, 2014, doi:10.2307/466240.

not political action and transformation.” Habermas himself also noted the Eurocentric limitations of his universalizing vision when confronted with the inquiry of the applicability of his theories to progressive forces in the Third World.¹⁹⁸ These critiques are undoubtedly important. I will address Sousa Santos’ critique below. Nevertheless, my brief addressing of many of these issues should not be understood as discounting them. The vast array of practices that use language as a central format for creative social reimagining are far too heterogenous to be contained within a simple comparative axis of Freire/Habermas. My brief comparative analysis of Freire’s and Habermas’ understanding of dialogue and communicative rationality is important in order to understand their respective roles in the discursive framing of contemporary community-based art practices that use dialogical action as a central entry point into artistic and cultural action.

The implications of their methodology and, ultimately, how it may have been understood and applied in later art practices, are important for a few reasons. First, this methodology obviously provides an important first step in understanding the dialogically based art practice itself. It begins by asking us to place the onus of our critique on the intersubjective and pedagogical nature of the practices themselves, rather than the “object” of art itself. Grant Kester has written about the challenge of seeing these practices on their own terms and

¹⁹⁸ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Public Sphere and Epistemologies of the South,” *Africa Development* 37, no. 1 (2012): 44.

locating the “moment of indeterminateness, of open-ended and liberatory possibility...in the very process of communication that the artwork catalyzes.”¹⁹⁹ Secondly, the community-based art practices in Latin America, at the risk of oversimplifying the landscape, are overwhelmingly political and resistant in their perspectives regarding systems of oppression and anti-democracy. There is no need to qualify this assertion, given the rich and extensive history of politically critical art in Latin America. That history of critique of how power operates cuts to the heart of Freire’s and Habermas’ concerns in developing a democratic and inclusive platform for action. Understanding these related platforms – communicative action or *conscientização*, for example – as unwieldy or theoretically bound as they may seem, gives us some tools for beginning to understand cultural practices that share similar methodological aspects and concerns.

Freire and Habermas’ shared relationship not only to a commitment to dialogue and learning, but to the social sciences as well, points to an important convergence. Torres and Morrow convey this convergence in comparing their respective research to critical hermeneutics, a field of philosophy dedicated to the study and theory of interpretation. Critical hermeneutics rejects a reliance on an agent’s or native’s self-reports and interpretations of texts or documents of culture, understanding that “new forms of emancipatory reflection” can be

¹⁹⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 90.

achieved using dialogue in order to “distanciate” from the constraining and enabling effects of daily power structures.²⁰⁰ Projects that carry this intersection between the study of culture and power often use dialogue to present unique or particular viewpoints and in-depth understanding of cultural and social dynamics they hope to change through self-conscious reflection on existing social conditions. The primary goal of communication in this form of critical dialogue is not informative, but transformative.

As in the participatory action research inspired by Freire, there are several questions with regard to the relationship between the wide range of social sciences and the other extra-disciplinary forms of knowledge that contribute to any community’s worldview. The concept of the extra-disciplinary is borrowed from the work of Stephen Wright and Brian Holmes, who argues for the “use” of knowledge operating outside of the established canons of academic disciplines altogether.²⁰¹ This is an intriguing argument if one considers, as Torres and Morrow argue, that critical participatory research and learning often require the employment of a full range of methodological techniques: “A critical theory of methodology, we would argue, is *reflexively pluralist but not relativist* because there are both situated (pragmatic) and universalizing criteria for assessing and evaluating research tradition and specific research practices.”²⁰² With regard to

²⁰⁰ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 44.

²⁰¹ Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, 66.

²⁰² Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 55.

Freire, this situates the multiplicity of forms of knowledge that must be considered within a broader historical conception of the social sciences (which he calls “scientific humanism”) used towards conscientization.

The inquiry into an extra-disciplinary investigative frame also has important implication beyond the methodological understanding of a practice. The knowledge we choose either to privilege or discard opens up experiences and ecologies in particular directions and along various histories. There are options to be taken. Some of those histories are, to use a Freirian term, life affirming. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, for example, investigates a vast array of arguments, conceptions, and theories that, though produced in the West by recognized intellectual figures, were “discarded, marginalized or ignored because they did not fit the political objectives of capitalism and colonialism at the roots of Western modernity.”²⁰³ He again reminds us that this marginalization is also another foundation of colonialism:

There is little to be expected from the interculturality currently maintained by many in the West if it does not entail retrieving an originary experience of interculturality. In the beginning there was interculturality, and from there we went on to culturality. Only an intercultural West will want and understand the interculturality of the world and contribute to it actively. The same is probably true of other world cultures, past and present...The aim is to intervene in the present as if it had other pasts beyond the past that made it into what it is today. If it could have been different, it can be different.

²⁰³ Sousa Santos, “A Non-Occidental West?,” 106.

My concern is to show that many of the problems confronting the world today result not only from the waste of experience that the West imposed upon the world by force, but also from the waste of experience that it imposed upon itself to sustain its own imposing upon the others.²⁰⁴

Research and the unity of theory and practice

This inquiry into methodology, more specifically Freire and Habermas' methodology, is connected to the notion of the "unity of theory and practice" in that it speaks to the actual process and forms of research and knowledge-building activities that carry emancipatory potential. To that end Freire has no use, and sees no future, for the "value-neutral technocratic" and empirical social research that does not take into account local knowledge. He refers to these researchers as "invaders," and social science, in this case, becomes a form of cultural invasion.²⁰⁵

Whether urbane or harsh, cultural invasion is thus always an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture, who lose their originality or face the threat of losing it. In cultural invasion (as in all the modalities of antialogical action) the invaders are the authors of, and actors in, the process; those they invade are the objects. The invaders mold; those they invade are molded. The invaders choose; those they invade follow that choice—or are expected to follow it. The invaders act; those they invade have only the illusion of acting, through the action of the invaders.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 105.

²⁰⁵ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 56.

²⁰⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 152.

Furthermore, Freire says the following regarding the role of the researcher in the field:

Well-intentioned professionals (those who use "invasion" not as deliberate ideology but as the expression of their own upbringing) eventually discover that certain of their educational failures must be ascribed, not to the intrinsic inferiority of the "simple men of the people," but to the violence of their own act of invasion. Those who make this discovery face a difficult alternative: they feel the need to renounce invasion, but patterns of domination are so entrenched within them that this renunciation would become a threat to their own identities. To renounce invasion would mean ending their dual status as dominated and dominators. It would mean abandoning all the myths which nourish invasion, and starting to incarnate dialogical action. For this very reason, it would mean to cease being *over* or *inside* (as foreigners) in order to be *with* (as comrades). And so the fear of freedom takes hold of these men.²⁰⁷

But Freire also understands that there is an important need for empirical evidence and research to identify the causes of oppressive and dehumanizing forces. Calls for change and conscientization cannot be made unless the social and political forces of oppression are identified: "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity."²⁰⁸ But Freire also understands that if science is not neutral, that does not imply that there is no scientific rigor or objective truth:

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 156.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 47.

“The critical investigator wants the truth of reality and not to adapt reality to one’s own truth.”²⁰⁹ The role of the researcher is tied both to the need for objective, scientific inquiry and at the same time abandoning the idea of “neutral” science. Inquiry is autonomous, but its application is not. In working with the community, the artist/researcher must prioritize a humanizing science in favor of conscientization which entails a distancing of daily oppressive matrices and a reflective appropriation of reality. The subject and object (researcher/community) engage in participatory research and create a pluralist methodology of practice through dialogue.

This approach is similar to that of Hans Herbert Kogler, who argues for future methodologies of critical hermeneutics based on dialogue with the “other” in order to find a middle ground between the hermeneutical tradition of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which overly emphasizes consensus and privileges tradition, and that of Michel Foucault, who privileges the researcher/theorist as the only one able to see the effects of power.²¹⁰ Kogler argues for the significance of encounters in which we as interpreters might continue to disagree with the view of the other while still taking them and their position seriously, what he terms a

²⁰⁹ Paulo Freire, Carlos Alberto Torres, and Carlos Alberto Torres Novoa, *Entrevistas con Paulo Freire* (Mexico City: Gernika, 1978), 78. Cited in Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 57.

²¹⁰ Hans Herbert Kogler, *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 262. Cited in Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 95.

"radical openness to the other."²¹¹ This in order to see the effects of power in operation and be self-critical, but also not to see the other as a homogenous oppressed group. With regards to the relationship between the "theorist" and the "agent," Kogler states:

When power practices are at issue, the dialectic between theorist and agent works itself out in the reciprocal recognition of their interdependence in "defining" power: thus, while the theorist helps the agent to get a clearer understanding of *how* power works, the agent helps the theorist recognize which structural constraints *should* count as power...The dialogic cross-reconstruction can thus lead to defamiliarization on both sides, initiating a reconceptualization of cognitive premises both for situated agents and for theoretically informed interpreters.²¹²

Sousa Santos makes a direct critique concerning the use of Habermas' critical theory within Third World contexts; he points directly at the relationship between theory and practice. Sousa Santos identifies an immensely important concern regarding the use of critical theory, and particularly the notion of the public sphere, by artists, cultural workers and activists within the global South. He questions their adequacy within an infinitely varied ecology of knowledge.²¹³

These questions suggest that the social theories produced in the global North are not necessarily universally valid, even when they purport to be general theories. Moreover, they suggest that a hermeneutics of suspicion is recommended *vis-à-vis* such theories,

²¹¹ Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue*, 169.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 262-63.

²¹³ Sousa Santos, "A Non-Occidental West?," 57.

if the epistemological diversity of the world is to be accounted for. At this point, to account for such diversity involves the recognition that the theories produced in the global North are best equipped to account for the social, political and cultural realities of the global North and that in order adequately to account for the realities of the global South other theories must be developed and anchored in other epistemologies – the epistemologies of the South.²¹⁴

Sousa Santos defines an epistemology of the South as a process of construction and valorization of knowledge and their relations with different forms of knowledge based on the practices of peoples and groups who have been historically and systematically oppressed by colonialism and capitalism. It is thus not a geographic designation, but an anti-colonial one.

He rightly points out, as noted above, that Habermas' own admission that his theoretical universalism, is in fact, more suited to Europe, and calls it a form of "benevolent but imperialist universalism, for it fully controls decisions concerning its own limitations, imposing on itself, with no other limits, what it includes and excludes."²¹⁵ Sousa Santos calls for a "transgressive sociology" that "keeps distance" from the dominant versions of Modernity by "placing oneself simultaneously inside and outside what one critiques." He cites two key reasons for this "distance": first, Sousa Santos correctly claims that critical theory has defined itself by "owning" a set of nouns to distinguish itself from conventional

²¹⁴ Sousa Santos, "Public Sphere," 45.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 46.

bourgeois theories. Among them he cites alienation, socialism, dependency, communism, class struggle, and so on. But something has changed recently:

For the last 30 years, the Eurocentric tradition has been identified by the adjectives with which it qualifies the proper nouns of conventional theories. Thus, for instance, if conventional theory speaks of development, critical theory refers to alternative, democratic or sustainable development; if conventional theory speaks of democracy, critical theory propounds radical, participative or deliberative democracy; the same is true of cosmopolitanism, which is then qualified as subaltern, of opposition or insurgent, or rooted; the same regarding human rights, which turn out to be radical, collective, intercultural. These changes, however, must be taken with caution.²¹⁶

He is less concerned with the use of counter-hegemonic language because in the end, that language (i.e. participation) can, and has been, used by anyone, including those on the right. His concern is that these nouns define the term by which any action or horizon can be understood. Those terms define what is sayable, legitimate, and realistic; they also define what is unsayable, illegitimate, and unrealistic. Sousa Santos succinctly lays out the problem:

...by resorting to adjectives, theory assumes it can creatively take advantage of nouns, while agreeing, at the same time, to limit its debates and proposals to what is possible within a horizon of possibilities which is originally not its own. Critical theory, therefore, takes on a derivative character which allows it to engage in debate

²¹⁶ Ibid., 47.

but not to discuss the terms of the debate, let alone explain why it opts for one kind of debate and not another.²¹⁷

The second key reason for “keeping distance” vis-a-vis Eurocentric critical traditions is what he calls a “phantasmal relation between theory and practice” which frames the discrepancy between what theory can foresee and the emancipatory and transformative practices that actually take place in the world. For the past 30 years, certain social groups (indigenous peoples, mineworkers, homeless activists) have been involved in the most progressive social struggles. Sousa Santos argues that these are communities of peoples and actions who organized themselves in ways that European critical theory had never anticipated. The problem of language reveals itself when the claims and aspirations of these groups “are translated into colonial languages, the usual terms of socialism, human rights, democracy and development give way to dignity, respect, territory, self-government, good life, mother earth.”²¹⁸ This split goes beyond differing contexts, as the social movements in the global South have often based their struggles on popular, ancestral, and spiritual knowledge that is alien, if not disturbing, to the established tenets of critical theory. The case study of Pablo Sanaguano’s work below will highlight some of these difficulties.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 48.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

This split speaks to a strange relationship that has developed between theories from the global North and practices from the global South. If theory cannot frame or envision the practice, what happens? The practice becomes sub-theorized. What happens when practice cannot use or apply theory? Theory becomes irrelevant. When theory doesn't pay attention or minimizes the relevance of community-based practices, as it has until very recently, you end up with an impoverished "blindness" to the practice of art. Sousa Santos argues that if theory can't understand the present, then it won't see the future.

...theory is no longer at the service of the future practices it potentially contains, and serves, rather, to legitimize (or not) the past practices that have emerged in spite of itself. Theory stops being orientation to become ratification of the successes obtained by omission or confirmation of foreseen failures.²¹⁹

The blindness of practice, he argues, entails resorting to a heterogenous, theoretical jumble of sources to qualify immediate needs. There is no long-term vision for anticipating future practices, only "rhetorical exercises" that can only be seen as "opportunistic." He concludes this point by saying: "In a nutshell, the phantasmal relation between theory and practice can be formulated in this way: from the point of view of theory, theoretical bricolage never qualifies as theory; from the point of view of practice, a posteriori theorization is mere parasitism."²²⁰

This is an important point worth repeating: if theory's only use, and its only

²¹⁹ Ibid., 49.

²²⁰ Ibid.

purpose, is to qualify the successes of past practices it had no hand in forming or directing, or to critique failures as a way to bolster its own importance - a form of rhetorical exercise, then what we end up with is an impoverished form of theory. It is, in part, impoverished due to its lack of a vision of the future and its inability to challenge the language that defines the established intellectual and political horizon. If you let others (i.e. European critical theory) define what is sayable, then you are also conversely defining what is un-sayable. In these cases, critical theory has a certain “derivative character” which allows it to engage in debate but not to discuss the terms of the debate.²²¹ This inability to define the future is a form of impoverishment. It also has a certain hegemonic quality: there is quite a distinction between naming and being named.

In the face of these differing world views, there is then an urgent need for an “intercultural translation” if these practices from the South are going to be appreciated on their own terms. By being appreciated on its own terms, I mean that these practices must be investigated with the open mind – being open to be *taken by surprise* – that comes from understanding that there are few, if any, established models within critical theory that fully capture their praxis. The work of intercultural translation begins with understanding that many social practices

²²¹ Ibid., 47.

operating within the shadows of the attention economy²²² are not going to fit neatly into a Western canon of theory and are being informed by practical and historical traditions that often escape disciplinary capture, or at the very least, art-world ontological capture. Thus, openness to work with the unexpected, or surprise, within theoretical work can only come about if one is committed to learning from the social practice itself.

To differentiate against what Sousa Santos calls an avant-garde that by definition is never taken by surprise, he calls for “rearguard” theories that go hand in hand with the work of social movements. The theoretical work he proposes “calls for artisanal rather than architectural work, work of committed witnessing rather than clairvoyant leadership, accessing what is new for some and very old for other people.”²²³

Does the application of Habermas’ concepts, such as the public sphere, in the global South reinforce or make more transparent the phantasmal relation between theory and practice? Sousa Santos brings up timely reminders of the extent of the work that lies ahead. He also reminds us that what is required is a *dialogical* form of *cultural* practice that is based on language to create platforms for intercultural translation. If social justice is grounded in cognitive justice, as he

²²² This term is attributed to Stephen Wright who uses it to designate an event-based form of practicing art world that consumes culture *through an ontological economy of performing art as an event to be witnessed*.

²²³ Sousa Santos, “Public Sphere,” 51.

states, then the latter is based upon the ability of social agents to communicate those translated forms that unite groups and their concerns together.

The 'translation of knowledges' assumes the form of a 'diatopical hermeneutics'. This kind of work is what makes the ecology of knowledges possible. 'Diatopical hermeneutics' consists in interpreting two or more cultures, aiming to identify isomorphic concerns among them and the different answers they provide... Diatopical hermeneutics stems from the idea that all cultures are incomplete and may, therefore, be enriched by engaging in dialogue with or confronting other cultures. Recognizing the relativity of cultures does not necessarily imply adopting relativism as a philosophical stance. It does imply, however, conceiving of universalism as a Western particularity whose supremacy as an idea does not reside in itself, but rather in the supremacy of the interests that support it.²²⁴

The proposal is clearly one that is founded on the promise of dialogue to support and create what Kester calls "politically coherent communities" via the use of intersubjective dialogical modalities, where cultural learning is based on creating platforms for hope and possibility. Hope, as I have noted, is foundational for Freire in creating a praxis for liberation:

Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the "dialogical man" believes in others even before he meets them face to face. His faith, however, is not naive. The "dialogical man" is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power... Whereas faith in humankind is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue, trust is

²²⁴ Ibid., 59.

established by dialogue...Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men's incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search—a search which can be carried out only in communion with others...As the encounter of women and men seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious.²²⁵

True to his occupation as a teacher, Freire unambiguously centralizes hope and faith as an *a priori* condition for creating a dialogical praxis. As a result of that directness, others have noted his tone and language has an almost existential quality. Morrow and Torres convincingly make the case for rethinking Habermas' understanding of "ideal speech situations" within a similar frame that directly undercuts his most recurring criticism: mainly, that he was naive with respect to the possibility of authentic consensus. Given that all communication is fraught with conflict, misreadings and self-interest, the idea of an "ideal speech situation" has been misunderstood, according to Morrow and Torres, as a "concrete" goal. "Concrete" suggests that it has been argued that the goal of any social project/practice was to literally turn the social world on its head and suspend all asymmetrical power relations so newly-appointed equals would be free to pursue the truth. Habermas seems to acknowledge his earlier role in this mis-reading:

²²⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 90–93.

I criticize...my own discourse on the 'ideal speech situation,' as examples of 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.' These images are concretist, because they suggest a final condition that might be achieved in time, which cannot be what they are intended to suggest. But I continue to insist on the idealizing content of the inescapable pragmatic presuppositions of a praxis from which only a better argument is supposed to emerge.²²⁶

Habermas sees the status of idealized consensus and dialogue as an empirical counterfactual. Participants must act *as if* speech and consensus was a real possibility. This is a precondition for transcending oppressive forces and creating collective learning.²²⁷ The counterfactual statement might read like this: If communities do not act in a way that can create ideal speech situations, then oppressive forces will never be transcended. It is a fallibilistic position with regard to ideal speech. This is the fundamental work that lays the foundation; it is not the universally binding final product. This position reflects an awareness of the problem of language and its inherent obstacles and places this challenge at the heart of the social project/practice. Rather than a presumed ignorance or naiveté regarding power relations, Morrow and Torres are arguing that the practice, in engaging in the creation of ideal speech situations, is taking into account and thematizing the historical conditions of "suppressed dialogue." This is a theoretical paradigm that is reflective of its social conditions and contexts, not a misplaced belief that ideal Socratic dialogue can exist anywhere, even

²²⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 148.

²²⁷ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 51.

within existing oppressive structures of communication.²²⁸ My contention is that by framing the *empirical counterfactual* of idealized consensus and dialogue within in act that must be taken on faith (*to act as if*) – the faith in a possible reality, but acted upon fallibilistically in the here and now – we are moving into the realm of experimental and theoretical propositions that must learn from the social practice itself.

Within the framing of dialogue and intersubjectivity which the work of Freire and Habermas argues for, it is important to remember our traditional relationship to art as defined by aesthetic theory. Habermas might have inherited (and began his early work attempting to universalize) a Eurocentric “public sphere” or the Kantian transcendent “common sense” by which the manner of learning was universal, but his later acknowledgements certainly point towards an increased emphasis that was certainly more universal: a contextual and dialogical form of intersubjective cognition that is based on what Kester calls the “ethics of communicative exchange.”²²⁹

As we might recall, this form of dialogical exchange in art is distinctly different from the experience of autonomy that must be afforded the aesthetic object of art in that specificity and context must be purged from the “exchange.” Kester summarizes the aesthetic experience this way:

²²⁸ Ibid., 52.

²²⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 106.

Here we experience aesthetic perception by abstracting from the specific conditions of the object qua object to the object as representation, or *Darstellung*. This image acts as a kind of catalyst, setting in motion our cognitive operations without the practice consideration that are forced upon us by objects in the real world. It is our reflective “apperception” of these operations that allows us to intuit the existence of a ground for communication (and potential unity) with other human beings...But this promise can be fulfilled only by robbing the object of aesthetic contemplation of its specificity and its ability to speak to us in turn.²³⁰

We are not asked to suspend meaning away from the social contexts and interactions in order to create meaning. Self-interest can still be transcended, but the cognitive process is now firmly invested in an intersubjective effort, however provisional, towards transformation through empathy and interpersonal analysis of our communication skills. There is no guarantee that “ideal speech situations” will create the desired outcome; nevertheless, we create contingent bonds through collective learning processes that further aid our transformative ends. In these scenarios, participants, like the theorist and the artist, must suspend judgment in order not to fall into Habermas’ “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” while allowing social processes to develop over time.

This reading of Habermas, within the frame of dialogue and liberation, particularly set against the history of liberatory pedagogy and theology, lends a different tone to Habermas’ work. And although he never truly considered the

²³⁰ Ibid., 108.

intellectual or cognitive lineages of areas outside Europe in the development of his main body of theoretical work, one might even argue that this satisfies Sousa Santos' call for a renewed relationship between theory and practice, a relationship where the theory learns from the practice.

This chapter concludes with the following case study that investigates the work of a former Catholic seminar student, Pablo Sanaguano, and his work with Kichwa communities in the highlands of Ecuador. His early training in Liberation Theology informs his art practice. This case study also investigates how the national government of Ecuador appropriated indigenous knowledge to create a political movement focused on environmental and social justice. Finally, it will attempt to make links between Sanaguano's localized art practice and the official legislative language found within the Ecuadorean Constitution that reflect larger decolonial positions within both forms of action: the artistic and the legislative.

Case study: Los Hieleros del Chimborazo²³¹

²³¹ This text is based on an original published essay: Bill Kelley, Jr., "Embodied Memory: Reimagining and Legislating Sumak Kawsay in the Modern Andes," in *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good*, eds. Johanna Burton, Shannon Jackson, Dominic Willsdon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming). The author wishes to thank Dominic Willsdon and David Tompkins for their insightful comments and suggestions. Special recognition also goes to the work of María Fernanda Cartagena for her foundational research on the work of Pablo Sanaguano. Finally, the artist himself has been generously instrumental in making this text possible.

The 2006 presidential election that swept Rafael Correa into power in Ecuador, after years of political instability and an economic crisis that saw the dollarization of the economy, will be remembered for several advances, and some key failures, that were legislatively proposed in order to push the small Andean nation of fifteen million into new experimental forms of modernity. One of Correa's key legacies will be the 2008 Constitution and subsequent supporting documents that feature radical language reflecting indigenous ancestral knowledge. Correa is currently in his third term in office. He was recently forced to witness thousands of Ecuadoreans participating in street demonstrations against many of his government's policies. Add to this the recent visit by Pope Francis and his scathing critique of the president's recent environmental policy shifts, on the heels of the publication of the 190-page papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* in defense of the environment, that made international news.

Regardless, the Correa government's most enduring and well-documented achievement might be in the arena of education and cultural work. This case study considers the work of artist and activist Pablo Sanaguano (b. Riobamba, Ecuador, 1964), as well as the 2008 Constitutional language that looks to reconcile the environmental, the political, and the cultural, not only in the Andes, but also in the larger context of how art and cultural work can address such divergent sociopolitical interests.

* * *

Sanaguano has devoted much of his cultural practice to working with native Kichwa communities in the province of Chimborazo, Ecuador, where as a youth he witnessed discrimination against them firsthand. Indigenous communities who make up the majority of the population in this part of the world, and have traditions and knowledge that go back centuries, have been historically alienated from the larger nation-building process and imaginary. Despite the arduous travel time required to reach these communities at the foot of the now-dormant Chimborazo volcano, the geographic landscape and its natural beauty have been depicted and circulated for centuries. From colonial-era travel writers such as the Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt to the US-born painter Frederic Edwin Church, Chimborazo's snow-capped peak and its surrounding grasslands have been historically depicted as a sublime and depopulated mystery for foreign visual consumption.

Sanaguano was trained here in grassroots ecclesiastical communities and studied from 1982 to 1988 under Monsignor Leonidas Proaño (1910-1988), an important proponent and articulator of the Liberation Theology movement in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s. Sanaguano's first foray into art making was an early practice of drawing and political cartoons that communicated the deeply engrained prejudices he witnessed against indigenous culture and knowledge, while a seminary student (Figure 1). After Proaño's passing,

Sanaguano traveled to France to get formal training in art. He returned some years later to the high grasslands of Chimborazo to continue his work with the same Kichwa communities he had lived among as a seminary student, but this time as an artist following the same methodologies he had learned under Proaño.

That method, known as “see-judge-act,” was enthusiastically embraced by proponents of Liberation Theology during the 1960s and has endured as a relevant pedagogical tool to this day. As discussed in chapter two, it was pioneered by the Belgian Catholic priest Joseph Cardijn in the early twentieth century as part of his outreach to young factory workers and the movement he founded, Young Christian Workers. The idea is to see current social realities, to judge them in light of the church’s social teaching, and then to act to make those realities more just. Within the Liberation Theology movement, “see-judge-act” is understood as a metaphor for lay empowerment and broad community learning. Sanaguano believes this method is imperative but also believes that art fosters and strengthens this process by opening channels to affective bonding through collective imagination.²³² He was also greatly influenced by the dialogical learning and teaching method of Paulo Freire.

²³² María Fernanda Cartagena, “Interview with Pablo Sanaguano,” in *Collective Situations: Dialogues in Contemporary Latin American Art 1995–2010*, eds. Bill Kelley, Jr. and Grant Kester (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

Sanaguano often uses walking and community walks as a form of art practice. His most recent project, *Los Hieleros del Chimborazo*, consisted of following the trail (*chakiñanes*) used by the historic ice collectors of the Chimborazo volcano with members of the Kichwa community of La Moya, near the volcano. The ice miners, who climb to an altitude of 5200 meters to pick ice, have been filmed, documented, and photographed by foreign journalists and filmmakers for decades. What struck Sanaguano was that these depictions had never reflected the individual Kichwa miners as their own protagonists in the story. The arduous task and its sole protagonist were captured on film and circulated as ethnographic curiosities, ones in which the community itself never played a role.²³³ These narratives were never meant to be theirs.

The documentaries generally depict the one older male who is supposedly the final person to exercise this dying age-old tradition. Sanaguano's walking project begins with a screening of these documentaries after which the conversation centers on the role the community plays in such works. Questions begin to emerge challenging those depictions and the construction of an identity the Kichwa had no role in devising. Questions range from why the animals are not given credit for their work in the film to how is it that outside filmmakers can come to their community and not consult the elders.

²³³ One famous example would be *Los hieleros del Chimborazo* (1980) by Gustavo and Igor Guayasamín or the more recent *The Last Ice Merchant* (2012) by Sandy Patch.

Following this, the entire community makes the six-hour walk – adults, youth, and children alike (Figure 2). Along the way, conversations concern the observations and the historic relationship the Kichwa have with their environment and nature. Topics of discussion range from the receding layers of ice atop the dormant volcano and the effects of climate change, to the function of the high grasses that have been traditionally used to make the rope to carry the ice. Here in the high grassland region, the grasses have an important historic function, serving as an efficient and foundational material in the creation of traditional dwellings, although they are currently giving way to concrete blocks and metal siding imported from cities far away. This shift in the materials and knowledge that is being adopted is discussed in relation to that which is being left behind. During the walk, there are discussions about the creeks of water emerging from the ice glaciers atop Chimborazo and about the role the creeks, grasses, and landscape play in the cosmovision²³⁴ and memory of the Kichwa people. That conversation leads to reflections on the benefits and pitfalls around globalization and economic development and how those changes are affecting their environment and their lives. There are questions and reflections on the future of the community and their way of life. Further along the route, the very role this ritual of ice-mining holds is discussed, and inquiries emerge around the communal nature of how and why the ice was historically used for communal

²³⁴ The term “cosmovision” is not often used in English but is used frequently in Spanish and is adapted from the German *Weltanschauung* (welt = world, and anschauen = observe). It can be translated as “worldview” but this lacks the cosmological connotation of other possible worlds and non-Western forms of cognition.

festivals and why it is currently understood as only one man's job. Once at their destination, after thanking the Pachamama for their gathering, the community takes turn picking the ice (Figure 3). People who have never made the trek or considered the process learn the native tradition of making rope and preparing the donkeys to bring the blocks of ice down the volcano. At the conclusion of the journey, once everyone has returned to their homes, traditional ice treats are made with everyone contributing ingredients and shared with the community. Later, after some reflection, the community decided to create a new movie of their shared tradition.

Sanaguano sees the walk as an exercise in recreating memory and community identity. He sees this memory work as an important cultural as well as political act. Upon returning from Europe, he noticed that the communities had naturally changed, but he also noticed the rapid growth of NGOs in the region and the rise of capital speculation of natural resources in various parts of the country. He also perceived a rapidly growing evangelical presence in the region, affecting the communities and their ritualistic practices in ways that he considered dangerous. Why are memory and identity important to an indigenous community in the twenty-first century? I would argue that the reason is tied to two intertwined but equally important forms of building subjectivity: the cultural and the economic.

The region near Chimborazo has long been a destination for some of the key figures in the Liberation Theology movement: Monsignor Proaño, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Federico Carrasquilla, and Leonardo Boff, among others who all visited the region. The dramatic setting of the now-dormant volcano – the absolute highest point in the world from the center of the earth’s core, amid the high grasslands, hours by horse from the nearest town – must have seemed like a world away from the centers of Lima, Medellín, and São Paulo. But modernity and globalization (and their challenges) bypass no one. For Sanaguano, the questions that emerge while walking and reflecting on the links that remain amongst Kichwa communities regarding the knowledge and narratives of their ancestral land require critical collective inquiry and recuperation. That dialogical methodology was learned during his time learning under Proaño, but it is consequence of Freire’s influence on the Church’s pastoral work that it finds itself being applied now as an art practice. The walking and studying along the way are imperative pedagogical moments of praxis – Freire’s cyclical model of action and reflection. The reflective and dialogical component within his pedagogical methodology is inseparable from action; it gives action its purpose, and this form of communicative praxis is the key to liberation. As noted above, this achievement has the capacity to define us as human, and as subjects in the world – not objects – capable of naming the world and transforming reality.²³⁵

²³⁵ Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 34.

As noted previously, Freire's larger literacy project was not simply about learning to read your ABCs. In the 1960s context of a Brazil that was attempting to keep the vote limited to those who could read the ballot, surely his plan was one that attempted to teach basic skills, but ultimately, literacy was primarily a more concrete long-term project. If the colonial difference is between *naming* and *being named*, then literacy and a communicative praxis is a process of naming the world and building political subjects.²³⁶ It was in this vein that the theological agitators within the Catholic such as Proaño, adopted Freirian techniques and contributed to a pedagogy of liberation. It was this method of teaching and pastoral work that informed Sanaguano's formation as an artist.

A review of our understanding of praxis as a methodology is important here. One might ask why identity and memory-recuperation relating to ancestral land are important to an indigenous community in the twenty-first century? There are cultural and economical imperatives that require subjects operating simultaneously on dual fronts. The cultural work Sanaguano puts into operation is about expanding on the ongoing identification, as well as the narrative-building, of indigenous communities to their ancestral land. It is about continually doing the long-term labor of creating bonds that cross over from ritual to action/reflection and back again. It is a form of praxis that is put in place to further generate subjects out of those historically treated as objects. The fact that the walking

²³⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

workshops Sanaguano develops are intergenerational and that they involve the entire community, regardless of long-held gender roles, is a clue to the criticality that must be foregrounded within the community itself when these collective actions take form. While ancestral knowledge and memory work are central points of entry, all forms of cultural beliefs, particularly the most divisive, must be questioned collectively.

This form of cultural work is important because an indigenous future, as well as our own, depends on imagining an other possible world while learning from the past. And this recognition operates as much on the cultural level as it does on the political. Their terrain, both natural and cognitive, and their struggles to survive are equally ours. Given the predatory, extractivist logic currently pressing down on the Andes which sees neither future nor past (this logic operates globally), it would seem that Sanaguano is betting on an emancipatory tradition of art and pedagogy to build bonds to ancestral knowledge and the landscape that move from the cultural to the political and back again. He is building a form of intergenerational and gender-neutral praxis that can help carry a Kichwa imaginary forward by keeping youth and women involved in asserting both their ancestral rights and connections to their land as well as their ritual practices and knowledge that conversely affirm that identity. Those relationships are developed from within a Kichwa imaginary (epistemology) where ancestral knowledge – a worldview towards what many in that part of the world might call

sumak kawsay – plays the role of the protagonist, not the background in this story. And Sanaguano’s art form – his praxis – has political subject-building at its core.

* * *

The term *sumak kawsay* is a Quechua term that has been translated to roughly mean “buen vivir” in Spanish, or “good living” in English. Quechua is a living language family spoken by nearly ten million people across the Andean region, so the term has several meanings implying several forms of relationship. Primarily, it implies a relationship of intersubjective reciprocity, as it is often cited within the context of the extended communal family, or the *ayllu*. But this reciprocity can also extend to nature and one’s surroundings. Since we are mortal, natural beings, we are part of nature, so the reciprocity extends beyond our bodies. Just as importantly, these relationships carry the potential for a decolonial political dimension due to the inherently communal, cyclical, non-consumerist logic of *sumak kawsay*.

Immediately following the ratification of the 2008 Ecuadorean Constitution, the government published supplementary public documents elaborating certain aspects of the Constitution called the “National Plan for Good Living 2009–2013”

– the subtitle was “Building a Plurinational and Intercultural State”²³⁷ – which includes this description in its introduction:

*Good Living is the result of a search, over several decades, for new ways of living on behalf of Latin American social actors. It is the result of their demands in the face of the neoliberal economic model and paradigm. In Ecuador, these demands were eventually incorporated into the Constitution and have since become the guiding principles of the new social contract.*²³⁸

The legislative changes that the “National Plan for Good Living” impacted in some way could not have equaled the enthusiasm this discursive shift had set in motion. Theorists, artists, and social actors across the globe began to look intently toward the small Andean nation that was using indigenous concepts in the framing of a new legislative effort aimed at radical forms of civic reimagining. Convenings on the principles of *sumak kawsay*, and its possibilities within a legislative frame, immediately began to take form. But theory is rarely practice. The Constitution’s follow-through has not entirely gone according to plan. Enforcement has been a challenge. We will cover some of those challenges below.

²³⁷ The framing of Ecuador as a plurinational state, is quite different than the idea of a ‘multicultural’ state in the way that it has been framed in the United States. The argument for plurinationalism is born for the argument that historic communities of kichwa peoples, for example, are distinct and unique cultures. It is not an argument for equality through assimilation towards a collective national imaginary, but as an assertion of difference and equality through that very unique position of distinct cultural identity.

²³⁸ “National Plan for Good Living 2009–2013” [*Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo*], <http://plan2009.senplades.gob.ec/web/en>. This document was published both in English and Spanish.

The reasons for the aforementioned theoretical excitement are easily understandable. The language found in the government's *sumak kawsay* document is revolutionary for important reasons. After years of political instability, Ecuador managed to invite people who were truly representative of the various community-driven interests to rewrite their Constitution. The language and issues addressed reflect both the document's as well as the region's plurinational diversity. More importantly, the National Plan covered some key issues that have never been addressed before in constitutional form, much less with such unambiguous language. Notions such as interculturality and plurinationalism were introduced into the larger cultural lexicon. Whereas the idea that Ecuadorean indigenous and Afro-American communities were unique cultures that should be addressed and understood discursively on their own terms²³⁹ was well established amongst social scientists, this new publicly-driven lexical realignment entered into wide circulation and became part of a national conversation very quickly.²⁴⁰ Not only did these ideas, once taboo, enter into a larger consciousness, they implied legislative action beyond anything ever proposed before. Regional and international theorists from various disciplines

²³⁹ An important distinction in this struggle for recognition of different social groups is its focus on difference, not equality. Given the different groups and their different histories, the recognition of that difference is a central argument for a plurinational state.

²⁴⁰ This is not to say that this discursive development happened spontaneously or simply through this legislative act. Indigenous community organizing through groups like Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), and social science research centers like FLACSO, had a great role to play in opening up a space for these conversations to happen.

came to Quito, and continue to arrive, thanks in great part to the National Plan's discursive and legislative potential.

*The 2009-2013 National Plan for Good Living raises significant technical and political challenges, as well as methodological and instrumental innovations. However, the Plan's greatest significance lies in the conceptual rupture with the so-called Washington Consensus and the most orthodox approaches to the concept of development.*²⁴¹

For Latin American thinkers, the history of *desarrollismo* – the Washington-backed developmental plans in place during much of the late twentieth century until the financial collapse in the first decade of the new millennium – is a history that is not distant enough. Early challenges came from social scientists and intellectuals in the late 1960s with the articulation of dependency theory. As noted in the previous chapter, dependency theory states that the history of Latin America was one of *dependence* built on the massive exploitation and exportation of raw goods and natural materials for the purposes of enriching international centers of production and their local allies. The explanation for underdevelopment was a structural inequality that had less to do with backwardness than it did with dependency. The National Plan interlocks the questions of environmental sustainability and social reimagining, and places them firmly within the purview of a larger political and economic decolonization

²⁴¹ “National Plan for Good Living 2009–2013.”

project. Under the heading of Change of Paradigm: From Development to Good Living:

The prevalent concept of “development” is undergoing a profound crisis. In part this is only due to the colonial perspective from which the concept is derived. But it is also a result of its failure throughout the world. The present global crisis has demonstrated that it is impossible to maintain the current patterns of accumulation. For the South, it has meant an extractivist and devastating path to development, with unequal relations of power and trade with the North. Moreover the unlimited consumption patterns derived from this model are leading the entire planet to collapse, given that the biosphere is unable to ensure its capacity for regeneration. It is essential, therefore, to promote new modes of production, consumption, and organization of life and coexistence.

The hegemonic ideas of progress and development have generated a monoculture that invisibilizes the historic experience of the diverse peoples that compose our societies. A linear vision of time supports the concept of progress, modernization and development in which history has only one purpose and one direction: developed countries are ahead and are the “model” all societies should follow. Whatever falls outside these ideas is considered savage, primitive, obsolete, pre-modern (Sousa Santos, 2006: 24).²⁴²

Sumak kawsay is therefore not only a cultural position with regards to social organization; within the document, it begins to map out a viewpoint toward alternative economic/political development. When asked about “el buen vivir,”

²⁴² Ibid. Portuguese sociologist Sousa Santos is cited within the original document: Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Renovar la teoría crítica y reinventar la emancipación social* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2006).

Alberto, who was President of the National Constitutional Assembly during the drafting and ratification of the Constitution, stated:

Sumak kawsay or good living is a worldview that emerges strongly from the peoples of the South, the same people that have been marginalized throughout history. Good living does not imply an academic policy, but rather it is an opportunity to learn from realities, experiences, practices and values in many different places, even now in the midst of a capitalist civilization.

This good living, to attempt a first definition, proposes the search for life where man is in harmony with himself, with his fellow man and with nature, understanding that we are all interdependent and that we exist because of the other. Searching for these harmonies does not imply ignoring social conflicts and social and economic differences, nor deny that we live within an order, a capitalist one, that is first and foremost predatory. Precisely, *sumak kawsay* would be a pathway out of this system.²⁴³

While the notion of growth as the means of economic development is rejected, it opens the possibility of other forms of lifeworlds—other cosmovisions—with regard to our understanding of natural resources. The cyclical and interdependent relationship between humans and their environment is affirmed. According to *sumak kawsay*, if nature is a living being, it is a limited being.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Luciano Concheiro, “El buen vivir: Una conversación con Alberto Acosta,” *Horizontal*, February 27, 2015, <http://horizontal.mx/el-buen-vivir-una-conversacion-con-alberto-acosta>. Translation by the author.

²⁴⁴ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Can Rafael Correa Deliver His Citizens’ Revolution for Ecuador?,” *The Guardian*, May 29, 2014,

Good Living is based on a vision that surpasses the narrow confines of quantitative economicism and challenges the notion of material, mechanic and endless accumulation of goods. Instead the new paradigm promotes an inclusive, sustainable, and democratic economic strategy; one that incorporates actors historically excluded from the capitalist, market-driven logic of accumulation and redistribution.

Similarly, Good Living revises and reinterprets the relation between nature and human beings, and proposes a shift from the current prevailing anthropocentrism to what we may call bio-pluralism (Guimaraes in Acosta, 2009). Good Living posits that humans should use natural resources in a way that allows their natural generation (or regeneration.)

Finally, Good Living also relies on social equality and justice, and gives importance to dialogue with—and acknowledgement and value of—diverse peoples, cultures, forms of knowledge and ways of life. Good Living, therefore, is a complex, non-linear concept which is in permanent re-signification.²⁴⁵

If the notions of interculturality and reciprocity found within *sumak kawsay* were key terms to designate a cultural realignment of the historic social order, they also act as a metaphor for a parallel economic project. The cultural project within the Constitution entails a defense of ancestral knowledge, supporting communal rights, and respect for various ethnic groups. These are situated as a structural support for a parallel argument, a new economic developmental model.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/29/rafael-correa-deliver-citizens-revolution-ecuador>.

²⁴⁵ “National Plan for Good Living 2009–2013.” Ecuadorean economist Alberto Acosta is cited in the original document: Alberto Acosta, “El buen vivir, una oportunidad por construir,” *Innovaciones y retos constitucionales* 75 (2008): 33-47.

And in this coupling dynamic, the most discussed aspect of the *sumak kawsay* documents are undoubtedly the Rights of Nature found within the Constitution, crafted with support from the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund.

Article 71. Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes. All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature. To enforce and interpret these rights, the principles set forth in the Constitution shall be observed, as appropriate. The State shall give incentives to natural persons and legal entities and to communities to protect nature and to promote respect for all the elements comprising an ecosystem.²⁴⁶

In order to understand this coupling of the cultural project – the revindication of ancestral knowledge and the economic project of decolonization – let us return to the notion of the family or *ayllu*. The *ayllu* is a long-understood and practiced form of communal living in the Andes – a political form of family and community organization. In this communal living, the notion of reciprocity/cooperation is a central concept. That reciprocity is not only one of communal collaboration and assistance, but is also extended to nature—it is the notion that nature has life, it is a limited being and consequently has rights. This repositioning of nature to reflect the Andean cosmivision is not only a political

²⁴⁶ National Assembly, “Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador,” October 20, 2008, <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.

realignment, it is a historic one. What is in play is what horizons indigenous communities living within an extractivist economy have before them, what they may question, in the face of the teleological trajectory of capital and its seemingly limited historical possibilities. As in the work of Pablo Sanaguano, cultural work is the base upon which we build political subjects. The revindication of ancestral knowledge and the economic arguments within *sumak kawsay* go hand in hand.

But something went wrong with the subsequent reelection of President Correa and his political party Alianza PAÍS, something that did not sit well with his original supporters, particularly with intellectuals. What Correa has called the “Citizen’s Revolution” began to unravel with the recent 2013 decision to allow oil drilling within the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve. Other financial capitulations soon followed. Acosta has been one of the main critics of the ways in which the concept of *sumak kawsay* has been appropriated. Rather than framed as an “alternative to development,” *sumak kawsay* has been implemented simply as a “developmental alternative,” meaning that fundamentally, it seems to be carrying little weight toward rethinking the relationship between natural resources and the extractivist capital that has driven the Ecuadorean economy over these past few decades. The nature/culture division of the West, it seems, remains intact.

Part of the problem is that naturally “el buen vivir” is a process of living, while governments generally attempt to frame certain productivist qualifiers in

qualitative ways. The former has a long-term view of how that goal is accomplished, while the latter necessarily has short-term aims. Culturally as well, what was initially going to be a challenge (and what has not been upheld) was the possibility of revindicating certain ancestral knowledge and worldviews in the construction of new political forms. For example, the construction of new schools of indigenous knowledge and research that were promised but never built, or the tension between increased mining and drilling interests and outraged indigenous groups and conservationists who accuse the government of simply making slogans. It is clear that in some cases, what was opted for by the government was defining a “buen vivir” for the general population, and perhaps one that represented a form of ideal citizenship, but not the cultural, social, and political realignment many had hoped for.

Is it possible to attempt to embed what are essentially non-Western concepts into a modern Western political platform? What about the idea of transforming a distinct cultural way of life such as *sumak kawsay*—a cosmologically embedded and embodied form of community knowledge—into a political, qualitative dimension? When Ecuador benefitted from high oil prices, things certainly looked more optimistic.

What becomes clear from the work of cultural actors like Pablo Sanaguano is the importance of long-term cultural and community work with

respect to future political and legislative action. The tenets of *sumak kawsay* demand an active and dialogical form of subject-building that is equally intersubjective and embodied within the natural world. It is in Sanaguano's practice that the larger themes of interculturality and reciprocity create an important space for reflection and action—praxis. And at the same time his work operates in a more personal level. To hear him speak about it, there is an excitement within the La Moya community of creating their own narrative and being the protagonist in the representation of their own ritual practice. For a community that has historically been alienated from the colonial centers of culture – Ecuador has two colonial-era UNESCO world heritage sites – the ability to participate as protagonists in making “art” or making “film” is a major paradigm shift in thinking. The act of producing culture on that larger scale also serves as a human-scale indicator proving how cultural action can have profound effects in building political subjects.

* * *

In the following chapter we will begin to examine the cultural context of Medellín in 1968 and the formation of a new art world establishment to better understand the points of convergence and separation between both seminal events of that year: CELAM II and the inaugural Medellín Biennial. This examination will also address the violence that gripped the city and endured

throughout the decades that transformed Colombian society and gave birth to new forms of cultural practices and forms of resistance. Processes of memory recuperation and civic reintegration were formalized through government initiatives that addressed the experience of violence through education and cultural work, including re-launching the Medellín biennial in 2007. Finally, this chapter will investigate the possible intersections that can be activated between cultural community-based practices and cultural organizations like biennials, by asking larger questions about research and curation.

Chapter 4

Curating Social Practice: An exercise in conflicting methodologies

The other 68 Medellín: The inaugural biennial and its context

Up to this point I have discussed Medellín in regard to the 1968 Bishops' Conference in the city. But my inquiry into community-based practices took me to the city in 2010 to act as a curator and build an art biennial that continued the work of a previous generation of important biennials in the city, starting with the biennial that took place in 1968. It did not take long before I realized that the legacy of 1968 and the methodological legacy inherited through experimental pedagogies of community-based learning and Liberation Theology were alive and active in the Medellín of today. This chapter is about inquiring into the possibilities of reimagining a form of working where theory learns from practice, as well as framing an entire set of curatorial, investigative and organizational structures by way of that inherited legacy.

In 1968, both the inaugural Medellín Biennial of Art and the CELAM 2 conference took place – two major events that shared, on their surface, very little in common, but would emerge as seminal and lasting events that would define

generations of future actions and theories within their respective camps. In 1968, Colombia was emerging from the historically bloody period known simply as La Violencia. That simple moniker belied a gruesome ten-year (1948–58) period of civil war in Colombia, between the Colombian Conservative and Liberal parties. But the violence extended before and after that period. The violence that occurred between 1946 and 1964 resulted in over 200,000 deaths. An estimated one million people were displaced from their rural homes.²⁴⁷

In Chapter two, I covered the position the Liberation Theology movement held and articulated regarding violence and structural sin within the Medellín documents published for CELAM 2. The priests and organizers understood well the history of violence and oppression in their own countries, and made those issues a central concern within the conference. Medellín in particular, and Colombia in general, was victimized by the waves of political violence perpetuated throughout the hemisphere during the 1960s, so their comments should be read with regard to violence regionally, as well as locally.

Unfortunately, as art critic Eduardo Serrano Rueda notes in his essay on art of the period, few artists dealt with the topic of violence in their local context during the 50s and 60s, choosing instead to deal with violence, as well as the topic of Vietnam during the 1970s. One reason for this is possibly, as Serrano

²⁴⁷ Norman A. Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9, no. 4 (1967): 561–75.

points out, that the tiresome cycle of corruption and violence that made up so much of what made Colombian news and identity meant that dealing with the topic directly led nowhere, especially when every aspect of Colombian life was being accused of corruption.²⁴⁸

Colombia in the 60s featured important developments in avant-garde cultural production. The Constructivist period featured important artists like Edgar Negret, Omar Rayo and Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar as centerpieces of an active artistic scene. An important cultural movement at the time was the Medellín-based literary movement *Nadaísmo*.²⁴⁹ The movement that took the Spanish word for “nothing” in its name was popular from 1958, with the publication of its 42-page manifesto, through to the late 60s. Often referred to as “philosophically nihilistic,”²⁵⁰ the group became one of the few genuinely South American countercultural movements of the period. Its central figure, artist Gonzalo Arango, lead the group and had ties to Dadism and the Beat generation. In the first Manifiesto Nadaísta, Arango calmly states:

The fight will be uneven, considering the concentrated power available to our enemies: the economy, universities, religion, the press and other vehicles of expression of thought. And the depressing ignorance of the Colombian people, their reverent

²⁴⁸ Eduardo Serrano, "Los años setentas: Y el arte en Colombia," *Re-Vista del arte y la arquitectura en Latinoamérica* (Medellín) 1, no.4 (1980): 25. Serrano cites artists Carlos Granada, Augusto Rendon, and Pedro Alcantara in this regard.

²⁴⁹ There is no real translation for the term, but the most direct translation would be *nothingism*.

²⁵⁰ Lambert M. Surhone, Susan F. Henssonow, and Mariam T. Tennoe, *Nadaism* (Betascript Publishing, 2010). n.p.

credulity towards the myths that join a pitiful obscurantism regressing to a medieval period.

Standing before such an immense task, we resign to destroy the established order. We are powerless. The fundamental aspiration of *Nadaísmo* is to discredit that order.

This movement has been born in the midst of a frustrated generation, indifferent and solitary...²⁵¹

One key preoccupation of *Nadaísmo* – Colombia’s perceived “backwardness” – will be echoed by successive artists and critics of the period. *Nadaísmo* was hugely influential during the late 60s in Colombia, particularly in its hometown of Medellín. Its relation to the 60s counterculture in other parts of the globe was clearly evident. Its interests and definition were, by its own account, impossible to pin down. The very first lines of its inaugural manifesto opened with these words:

The *Nadaísmo*, in a very limited concept, it is a revolution in the form and content of the prevailing spiritual order in Colombia. For the youth it is a schizophrenic-consciousness against the conditions of passivity within the spirit and within culture.

You will ask me for a more precise definition. I cannot say what it is, because every definition implies a limit...²⁵²

²⁵¹ Gonzalo Arango, *Primer Manifiesto Nadaísta*, accessed July 29, 2014, www.gonzaloarango.com/ideas/manifiesto1.html. Translation by the author.

²⁵² Arango, *Primer Manifiesto Nadaísta*. Translation by the author.

Amongst weary youth, the questioning of reason and direct political action during an intense period of a violence and corruption is understandable. After decades when both the left and the right got their hands dirty in promulgating violence for the sake of a political/ideological stance, this cultural movement that “believes in nothing” does in some way explain the development of theoretical and artistic positions within the art world in Colombia around this time that showed no interest in seeing collective and political action as a possible avenue for cultural work.

So much has been written about the artists and various community groups and legislators who have addressed the issues of violence in Colombia that it has in fact become an academic discipline in and of itself: Violentology, with academic researchers introduced to me within the Sociology Department at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín as *violentologos*. Nevertheless, little has been written about how this period of intense violence, which began to shift in fundamental ways after 1993 with the killing of Pablo Escobar, affected the theory and pedagogy of art. The cyclical violence that is represented to the world through the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the narco-violence within the United States traced back to Colombian production are distortions of Colombian reality, at best. Garcia Marquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) gave the world a different panorama of Colombia from the historically elite view of a literate, white, Catholic country. It depicted an ethnically

diverse, syncretic and Caribbean Colombia. In this inclusive reading, past and present were fused together, unproblematically diffusing distinctions between modernity and tradition, reality and myth.²⁵³ There was an underside to this depiction: historical and political memory were relegated to obscurity while irrationality was understood as an essential national identity through which violence was explained away through myth and mirrors. The conflation of a present political reality with a mythic past made the grappling with modernity during the 1960s the focus of a central debate that would not be easily resolved.²⁵⁴

The uneasy feeling that modernity had not yet arrived was a theme echoed often enough to be a predominant anxiety amongst artists and thinkers of the period. Contemporary interviews with artists who had participated in the inaugural 1968 and subsequent 1970 Coltejer biennials in Medellín make continual reference to the idea that the biennial was needed in order to “bring new ideas” to the art world. This shared concern or anxiety that neither modernity nor modern art had yet to arrive in Colombia was echoed at the time by the critic Rueda, who goes on to say:

²⁵³ Marta Cabrera, “Representing Violence in Colombia: Visual Arts, Memory and Counter-Memory,” *Brújula* 6, no. 1 (2007): 37–56.

²⁵⁴ Violence in Colombia has been uninterrupted since the 1940s and it is far too complex an issue to tackle here. My intention is to bring up certain social and intellectual concerns at the moment of the CELAM II and Coltejer Biennial convening in 1968.

Towards the end of the 60s no one talked about a history of modern art in the country because no one thought we had one. It was considered to be in process for the very first time...the visual art scene in Colombia was, in conclusion, restrictive and provincial...the Coltejer Biennial was thus created to address this.²⁵⁵

The inaugural 1968 Biennial, directed by Leonel Estrada, with the financial support of the sponsoring textile company Coltejer and its president Rodrigo Uribe Echavarría brought contemporary art to a multitude of visitors. Coltejer was one of the oldest and most powerful companies in Colombia and sponsored four art Biennials in Medellín in 1968, 1970, 1972, and 1980.

Changes were happening outside the Colombian cultural scene that would also have profound effects. The 1964 Venice prize, which went to Robert Rauschenburg, a U.S. artist, for the very first time, shifted the focus of pictorial research from Europe to the United States and Pop Art. Pop Art was also represented in Venice by Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, and Claes Oldenburg, and this shift signaled the rise of Pop internationally. It was seen as an opportunity for artists around the world, including those participating in Medellín in 1968. Artists such as Sara Grillo, Sonya Gutierrez, and Fernandez Muro exemplified the new language of a Latin American Pop art. As a result, debates between figuration or abstraction and the questions surrounding the definition of modernity, posed by such powerful players such as Marta Traba and Romero Brest, were fully

²⁵⁵ Serrano, "Los años setentas," 26. Translation by the author.

engaged. For the organizers, such as critic Darío Ruiz Gómez, the biennial was an attempt to move beyond political “intolerance towards expressions deemed the enemy” that he saw exercised with the leftist “reactionary poets” of the time in his country. “The biennial,” he writes years later, “is for open discussion on various themes, to hear the silence that certain works proposed, not to indoctrinate the people and try to impose false icons.”²⁵⁶

The period was rich with artistic practices that would later influence the artistic scene in Colombia. The exhibition “Arte Nuevo para Medellín” of 1967 anticipates the Coltejer Biennial and attempts to lay the groundwork for new practices and new ideas in the region. The 1968 Coletejer Biennial was important not only in its own right, but was influential in later establishing the Museum of Modern Art in Medellín (MAMM) and beginning the biennial process that would culminate in the now-famous *Arte No-Objetual y Arte Urbano* colloquio of 1981, following the last biennial in 1981.²⁵⁷ The Coltejer biennials, later called simply the Medellín Biennials, were important in that they were geared towards Latin America, as opposed to the “internationalism” of the Sao Paulo biennial, established in 1951. The inaugural Coltejer Biennial in 1968 brought 180 art

²⁵⁶ Darío Ruiz Gómez, “Memorias del arte en a ciudad La Bienal de Medellín: Conectarse en diálogo con el mundo,” *El Mundo*, March 10, 2006, <http://www.elmundo.com/portal/pagina.general.impresion.php?id=13323>.

²⁵⁷ The *Arte no Objetual* colloquio of 1981 acted as a culmination of the largest and last of the Medellín biennials in that it focused less on the break from the past that was the hallmark of the first edition from 1968, but was focused instead on research and conceptual analysis. Carlos Arturo Fernández Uribe, “La Bienal de 1981 y el coloquio de arte no objetual y de arte urbano,” in *Arte en Colombia 1981- 2006* (Medellín: Universidad de Antioquía, 2007).

works from 93 artists. 37 Colombian and 56 international artists were brought in with the support of embassies. The art works were installed in the recently built Universidad de Antioquia and the jury was composed of Jean Clarence Lambert, Alexander Cirici Pellicer, and Dickens Castro. Given the privileging of regional participation, for many Latin American artists and countries it was the first time that they had participated in an “international” art biennial.

In the past 20 years, Colombian art historians have undertaken a critical revision of this period extending into the late seventies because of the rapid change and “ruptures” that took place within the intellectual and art scene. Many of these ruptures were solidified by artists who began working in the late 60s as well as by the establishment and involvement of cultural institutions during the period like the XXI Salon of National Artists of 1970, as well as the opening of new gallery spaces.

In the catalog for *Colombia, Años 70: Revista al Arte Colombiano*, the influential exhibition from 2002 that examined the period, scholar Carmen María Jaramillo argues that 1968 Medellín biennial, along with the Marta Traba-curated exhibition *Espacios Ambientales*²⁵⁸ of that same year, were central events in both the questioning of modern art and the development of contemporary art in

²⁵⁸ Exhibition held at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Bogotá, Colombia.

Colombia.²⁵⁹ She cites the importance of pedagogical materials – catalogs, publications, a dictionary, guided tours for the press – that were produced to introduce the public to this new form of art making. Included in these developments was the publication of *Re-Vista del Arte y la Arquitectura*, by artist Alberto Sierra, as a site for future critical analysis. From the very beginning, the Coltejer Biennial was envisioned as a site for public education about the modernizing project of artists and art-world institutions. With regard to the '68 biennial and art from this period, Jaramillo writes:

What could be called contemporary art, begins when an interior fracture is made evident within the various discourses of modernity, and therefore, modern art. That is to say: at the moment when the proposals of those who brandish an unrestricted defense modernity begin to weaken (progress, style, the autonomy of art) as well as those who propose an unrelenting rejection of their systems of operation (contempt for civilization, a search for origins).²⁶⁰

Understandably, the 1968 biennial exhibition failed to look beyond the production of artists who would argue for a rupture with the past that would investigate, in the most formal terms, a new visual language of Modern art, and subsequently would form the canon of Modern art in Colombia. By that, I mean the biennial did not begin to question the larger political questions of how the wide-spread violence in the region could be addressed by other forms of artistic

²⁵⁹ Carmen María Jaramillo, "Fisuras en el arte moderno: Nuevas propuestas," in *Colombia, años 70: Revista al arte colombiano* (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá / Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo / Academia Superior de Artes de Bogotá / Universidad Francisco José de Caldas, 2003), 8.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 72. Translation by the author.

practices and cultural work, nor did it investigate the larger pedagogical and ethical questions raised by the now widespread liberation movement echoed within Liberation Theology. It is understandable because CELAM II and the larger issues it raised were not on the avant-garde visual art's radar – neither in 1968, nor in subsequent biennials. That is not to say that artists were not concerned with social issues; they were and there are numerous examples that would demonstrate that interest. This is simply an acknowledgement that the art establishment at that time in Medellín, as recent revisions by contemporary art historians will reinforce, was primarily focused on advancing the visual art conversation towards a new and modernizing set of avant-garde principles but was not directly embedded in larger collective social/political movements. CELAM II and the Coltejer Biennial might have been situated in the same city at the same time, but they were worlds apart with regard to the communities they were addressing and the ways they would approach the cultural and social problems found within the region.

The ongoing reconstruction of public spaces and memory

The 1980s saw a rapid decline in support for cultural institutions, prompted on one hand by the emergence of narco-trafficking violence, particularly in Medellín, and on the other by stunted corporate sponsorships. The decline of

Medellín as a cultural center during the 80s and 90s was directly linked to the rapid rise in violence during these two decades.²⁶¹ The violence during this period was bewildering in its indiscriminate targeting. On the one hand, there were battles between the drug cartels and their rivals, a decades-old fight between the state and leftist rebels, and the emergence of right-wing paramilitary groups exercising terrorist tactics on farming communities. Every community was existing in a state of fear. On the other hand, there were selective political assassinations and targeted repression against labour leaders, students and other left-leaning activists during this period which created another level of fear of critical institutional engagement. This widespread fear that gripped every level of cultural and social life is the reason that it has been difficult to trace and research cultural contributions during this tumultuous period during which civic and cultural institutions were so greatly affected. This period and the ramifications of violence on cultural production in Colombia is an area of research that still needs undertaking.

The turnaround for Medellín began to happen in the mid-90s, after the killing of Pablo Escobar in 1993. That turnaround began through cultural and education projects that invested in the poorest and most violent neighborhoods in the city. Those projects were undertaken in part by local legislators, but also by persuading local business to invest in cooperation with public institutions. Non-

²⁶¹ Conrado Uribe, "Curatorial text for the Encuentro Internacional de Medellín" (Digital unpublished document, Medellín, 2011), n.p.

governmental organizations like Corporación Región, a human-rights organization which works with local governments, universities as well as with international artists like Suzanne Lacy, have also benefited from this marriage between public and private interests. After decades of violence, there have been recent efforts towards civic reintegration in the forms of massive funds dedicated towards education and strategic infrastructure building. City spending on education under the now-famous former mayor Sergio Fajardo Valderrama was raised to 40 percent of Medellín's annual budget of \$900 million.²⁶² Massive public building projects in formerly dangerous neighborhoods, such as the library-park system built by renowned architects that feature community services that include instruction in pre-natal care as well as art therapy for teens and community theater for the elderly, have garnered attention worldwide. When Fajardo states, "Our most beautiful buildings must be built in our poorest neighborhoods," he is understanding that the work of reconstituting a new relationship to the social and to governing bodies is one that is fighting decades of memory loss and trauma through violence. The resignification of public spaces was central to his larger urban project.²⁶³

²⁶² Simon Romero, "Medellín's Nonconformist Mayor Turns Blight to Beauty," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2007, sec. International / Americas, www.nytimes.com/2007/07/15/world/americas/15medellin.html.

²⁶³ Dominique Mashini, "Cómo hacer ciudad: El modelo Medellín," *Plataforma Urbana*, January 2012, <http://www.plataformaurbana.cl/archive/2012/01/09/como-hacer-ciudad-el-modelo-medellin>.

Many projects undertaken by Fajardo and architect Alejandro Echeverri, his former Director of Urban Projects, and even more projects and *corporaciones* undertaken by independent citizens, like Corporación Región, have come to be known as the general title of “Modelo Medellín” to the outside world. In fact, these disparate projects are rooted in very specific forms of community collaborations that I will cover below. With culture taking such a central role in the healing process and memory recuperation of the city, the art discourse regarding the relationship between art and politics uses a different tone. The rapid decline in violence in the city centers of Colombia – most notably Medellín, which according to reports has been safer than Washington D.C since 2006 – has created an interest on behalf of community and political leaders that reintroduced the biennial to Medellín in 2007 and again in 2011.²⁶⁴

With the assistance of Medellín's best-known artist, Fernando Botero, the Museo of Antioquia reopened in 2000 taking over the former mayor's building in the former heart of the city that had fallen on hard times, echoing the practice of placing *parque-bibliotecas* (library parks) and other large-scale cultural institutions in the poorest and most violent neighborhoods. The museum, like the *parque-bibliotecas*, is seen as part of a larger process of mobilization and

²⁶⁴ John Price, “Public Safety: The Cost of Living Dangerously,” in *Can Latin America Compete?: Confronting the Challenges of Globalization*, ed. John Price and Jerry Haar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 289.

transformation of the social.²⁶⁵ This is a very different approach to how we see museums and cultural institutions in the U.S.; then again, Colombia has just lived through a violent history that required something as intensely targeted and socially revolutionary as the reign of terror of Pablo Escobar. As the Museo de Antioquia's director from 2005-2010, Lucia Gonzalez said:

The act of rethinking the museum as a means and not an end unto itself allows us to act in different spheres than those expected to function within an institution of this type. This is how the political role is one that it should play, understanding politics as the construction of the public and, in it, the relating of responsibility we all have with the historical becoming, with our context, with the other.²⁶⁶

Community-based art practices currently make up a large and important sector of cultural production in Medellín in ways that would not have been conceivable in 1968. Despite these recent government-sponsored and community-based efforts, it is difficult to pinpoint what the relationship is between the rapid growth of numerous contemporary community-based art practices or *corporaciones* that take on the conflicts and social ruptures left behind by the violence, and the theoretical impact these practices contribute to the mainstream world of art and art theory, in general. After spending time working with these

²⁶⁵ Carolina Jaramillo Ferrer. *Los Museos como Herramientas de Transformación Social del Territorio: El caso del Museo de Antioquia*. (Medellín: Museo de Antioquia, 2007), 2.

²⁶⁶ Lucía González, *Nuevos museos para nuevos retos*. (Medellín: Museo de Antioquia, 2008), 2. Translation by the author. See also the interview of Lucía González by María Belén Sáez de Ibarra in *Periódico Arteria*, 7, no. 30, op. cit., 8-9.

practices in Medellín, it almost feels like the mainstream art world in Colombia is another plane of existence.

This lack of cohesion is also somewhat understandable given the financial concerns of the art world and the fact that these community-based practices have greater interlocution with the Social Sciences than they do with prevailing art world discourses. Understanding these works is dependent to some degree on various extra-disciplinary forms of investigation as well as the ability of scholars to work across disciplines in order to best interpret and exchange their findings. As scholar David Gutierrez Castañeda states, there still exists the “profound work of understanding” of how these practices place themselves critically in the face of terror in order to create new forms of sociability.²⁶⁷ Several scholars, such as Gutierrez Castañeda, argue that the art world and its exhibition platforms, often organized by and including ordinary citizens working in extra-disciplinary ways, are not the ideal place for these practices to be studied or activated.

What are the bridges that must be built in order for institutions of art (permanent or provisional) to create meaningful and sustainable relationships with these practices? First, we must attempt to understand that in the case of

²⁶⁷ David Gutiérrez Castañeda. “Some Frame-working Concepts for Art and Social Practice in Colombia,” in *Collective Situations: Dialogues in Contemporary Latin American Art 1995-2010*, ed. Bill Kelley, Jr., and Grant Kester (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

Medellín and many other sites of conflict, we are dealing with an urgent form of subjectivity building through the use of culture that requires more than what art institutions have historically provided.

Scholar Daniel Pécaut has written on the construction of a “subjectivity of violence” that is produced when violence becomes banal — when it stops being lived as a catastrophe, but instead becomes a set of parameters under which “normal” life is lived. Pécaut says the following regarding situations where violence becomes normalized:

Violence...appears as a banal process that offers opportunities, produces adaptations, and has norms and regulations. This triviality is not only about the personal profiles of those implicated in the violence, rather it is also expressed by the interactions that neither appear as a complete rupture with customary interactions nor give space to new representation or new imaginaries.²⁶⁸

For Colombian scholar Myriam Jimeno, the construction of the subjectivity of violence has the effect of experiencing violence as an inevitable product of a larger sociocultural matrix in which the individual is exposed and defenseless. That inevitability of violence, according to Jimeno, not only creates individuals that tolerate and even resort to violence themselves in certain situations, but also inhibits confrontational responses to that violence within those same

²⁶⁸ Daniel Pécaut, *Guerra contra la Sociedad* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana, 2001). Cited in Gutiérrez Castañeda, “Some Frame-working Concepts.”

situations.²⁶⁹ This fragmentation of the social fabric and the passivity of individuals within that fabric is addressed by many of the cultural practices currently operating in Medellín. By producing spaces of “confianza” – a term roughly translated as a space of confidence, ease and trust – these practices begin to create spaces of collective imaginaries and enunciations. Case studies seen below demonstrate four basic coordinates identified by Gutiérrez Castañeda in creating a new subjectivity from the context of violence and oppression: One, Actions taken against collective silence and the individual’s adaptive tendencies towards conflict. This can be understood as working against propensities to not see anything or know about what is happening within the community. Two: The activation and reinscription of public spaces in ways that change the signifying narrative from one of terror and violence towards one that begins to carve out other collective experiences. Three: The creation of community-driven *corporaciones* or non-profit organizations that have legal standing and that direct themselves towards the development of human rights, empowering collective decision making leading towards the realization of community-driven projects, and holding a central position of interlocution within local conflict resolution. Four: The construction of narratives and histories that can be both personal or contextual and that create “lazos” or links/ties of solidarity and sociability.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Myriam Jimeno, et al., *Violencia cotidiana en la sociedad rural: En una mano el pan y en la otra el reajo* (Santafé de Bogotá: Universidad Sergio Arboleda, 1998). 130.

²⁷⁰ Gutiérrez Castañeda, “Some Frame-working Concepts.” forthcoming.

An instrumental part of the curatorial work in support of art processes that take on such an intense responsibility of community work is to create the platform for facilitating such art-making within the art world context. In 2011, I was given that opportunity in Medellín. The process of creating such platforms and the case studies that follow will argue for a form of research and curatorial intervention that questions the theoretical foundations of aesthetics. Within a larger frame of analysis, this project represents my attempt to frame the methodologies by which we define research and curatorial work and begin to define for myself a theory that learns from the practice.

Curatorial work, the biennial, and Social Practice.

This section features and examination of a biennial I co-curated that focused on community-based practices. Rather than see this as a source of compromised research, I argue that in order to comment on the problems endemic in the art world with regard to these practices, one needed to participate in what Bourdieu might call an embodied form of knowledge building or research. It was essential to understand the complex relationship between these two forms of cultural work – community-based practice and curatorial labor – in order to comment on what constitutes a form of important research within the art system. This is an important question because the methodology of research in this field is

just beginning to define itself. There are no models that the art world has set for itself to study these forms of practices as they require a great deal of time in order to build the relationships within the artist and community collaboration that is often required. If one is studying these practices in foreign countries, costs will become an important factor. As such, curatorial practice is one of the few ways possible for an independent researcher to gain direct, first-hand knowledge of these complex, long-term projects. This kind of field research is essential.

Biennials and related international or regional events find themselves in a moment where they must address their previously assumed relationships to locality and the public. The increased presence of artists who work in the public sphere and the critical attention now paid to the disciplines of urban studies, architecture, and pedagogy within these art practices has only sharpened the resolve of curators and event organizers to recalculate their programmatic approach to the public. Collaborative and collective practices that work primarily with communities have established a special relationship with well-funded, mostly urban-centered events such as inSite in Tijuana, the Sao Paulo biennial, Manifesta in European centers, and the like. The relationship is based on their many shared interests: local urban issues, addressing the public, etc. This development is not new, but the overlapping interests have artists, curators, and these institutions reexamining, in new ways, the role each plays in their collective relationship.

That relationship between public art practices and biennials, has until now, been monitored by the historically bound methodologies biennials have formalized: that includes the traditional role of artist as authorial subject and curator as disciplined critic. But the institution as well as the curator is also under pressure from artistic practices that increasingly don't validate the historical models many biennials still employ. That pressure is being applied by collaborative and dialogical forms of working.

The shift in ways museums address the public go beyond the public programming long relegated to education departments: wall texts, gallery talks, etc. What is currently in need of addressing is the way curators and biennials attempt to position and relate to the public, and how, coterminously, they must position community-based art practices.

What is the role of the curator if that indeterminate and incommensurable quality found in art, that which the curator must situate and interpret, is found to no longer be the sole privileged objective of art making, or the sole province of the artist? What if what artists are doing no longer requires that traditional aesthetic intermediary role between art and the public? Dialogical community-driven practices are not only posing this question, but prompting their own response and this situation points to a crisis in the curatorial field. For example,

disciplines and professionalized cultural actors are becoming more fluid in their approaches. There is also a sense of political urgency, and the public's evolving relationship to culture making; a shift in the role of aesthetics, or a reanalysis of conceptualist strategies in a DIY age that has artists acting like curators and curators suffering from performance anxiety. This inquiry should be a welcome respite to the disciplined nature of the art world and its well-worn division of labor.

It is clear that we are starting to see this concern for public and community in how institutions evaluate their practices and examine their own histories and that this self-reflexive moment is part of a larger analysis that is fostered by the shifting roles of artists, curators and the public.²⁷¹ Why must there be a relationship between public art practices and biennials? First, public space practices are dependent on funding sources to make them happen. Given their focus on specific sites during specific time frames, biennials in general are organizationally tailor-made both for grants from funding institutions and facilitating public and civic engagement.

Secondly, the temporal and specific nature of these public art practices generally requires artists to inhabit and research the area. This is not only expensive, but it requires a structure that promises a special type of public experience – one that is special, in part because it is temporary. Curatorial

²⁷¹ Carmen Mörsch, "Alliances for Unlearning: On the Possibility of Future Collaborations Between Gallery Education and Institutions of Critique," *Afterall* 26 (Spring 2011): 5–13.

proposals are experimental (or so one hopes) because they will not necessarily last. Expensive residencies and experimental projects are possible for the same reason. Entire organizational structures are built and dismantled in a matter of months.

Thirdly, given the global/local nature of the biennial discourse, it is not enough to have local artists, but one must also invite international participation and ask all its participants to reflect on this *glocal* layering. Thus, local urban issues get taken up with ease, and positioned globally.

This relationship between biennials and the public interest is unique if one also considers, as many have already pointed out, that the unprecedented expansion of biennials — many new ones in developing countries — is one factor that has contributed to the growth of these kinds of public practices. The temporal nature of the biennial project is born of many factors. One thing to consider is that interventionist models in which the artist inserts him/herself into communities or contexts for a brief period of time makes a very different claim on the city than a more sustained and collaborative presence. For most curators, this distinction has not been a pressing issue. The idea of working with the public has been adopted wholesale without any clear understanding of the different ways that the artist positions the public. It has been assumed that the way curators work with community is the way the interventionist artist works with

community. Community-led practices are calling these relationships into question.

On the one hand, it is believed that institutional structures are not supposed to have a bearing on the practice itself; if the work is autonomous, then it is not contingent on adjacent systems of knowledge. And yet dialogical and collaborative practices focus precisely on the meaning generated through the forums and spaces of such engagement. In other words, what gets worked out, apart from the relations amongst participants, is the participants' relationship to forums and spaces and vice versa.

Curatorial paradigms built on the historic model of aesthetic autonomy are being pressured to recognize proposals that work within numerous disciplines. How does the work of a dialogical or collaborative project do this? For starters, the definition of "community" has to be aligned in ways that allow for a more dialogical and collaborative definition. Working in and with communities is different from using them as metaphors. This new definition, in turn, should require that curators do the same and rely on theoretical models that accommodate artist's actions. But is it enough to simply apply critical theories to standard curatorial policy? Problems come when the curator and the artistic practice deal with "the public" in radically different ways. A certain lesion in their distinct approaches starts to reveal itself. When collaborative proposals no longer

require that aesthetic judgment and autonomy play central roles, then curatorial models that support those perspectives need to be reconsidered. When meaning and collective action are no longer the analytical domain of critical discursive analysis but the content that is purposely generated through collective action and dialogically-driven pedagogical practices, then curators have to account for the methodology that says otherwise.

As noted previously, Habermas has noted that a subjective transformation occurs only through a dialogical model of social interaction – a kind of discursive ethic that implies a relationship with those around you. Through dialogue with others, change occurs, which leads to the question, “Who is the biennial’s dialogue with and what kind of dialogue is it?”

What makes dialogical and collaborative proposals different from more aesthetically bound public interventions is one that problematizes in real time the question of community and the artist's relationship to that community. The artist does not see community through a classic perspectival picture/window frame, whose very distance defines his subjectivity; rather, his subjectivity is defined by the proximity to, and exchange with, others. This distinction poses very specific questions about the role of the aesthetic, and as such, generates certain institutional and curatorial questions. If the curator as the traditional go-between is being challenged, it seems many artists are intent on finding more direct ways

to communicate with the public and a new model of curatorial labor working adjacently to the community practice could be emerging.

Teaching and Learning: 2011 Encuentro Internacional de Medellín (MDE11)

The Encuentro Internacional de Medellín (MDE11) offered an opportunity to propose an assertive realignment concerning the kinds of art practices and communities that can operate within an international biennial or an art event of this magnitude.²⁷² A “biennial” implies an entire team of people being on the same page and a variety of collaborating organizations willing to do their part. After being brought on by Jose Roca as a member of the curatorial team²⁷³, after two years of work that contained numerous trips to the city and countless hours conversing online, and now years after its closing, I see the MDE11 asking certain questions about the nature and sustainability of art’s relationship with the public and the entire biennial endeavor itself. This self-reflexivity is a constant

²⁷² The MDE11 is purposely not a biennial as it attempted to challenge certain biennial structures. One very important distinction was the extension of the event, September 1 – December 10, 2011. Its first, and more recent iteration, the MDE07, lasted almost six months. My point is not to approximate or use them interchangeably but to highlight certain challenges that still exist among similar formats.

²⁷³ Jose Roca, a Bogota-based curator and critic, along with Museo de Antioquia’s former director Lucia Gonzalez are both responsible for organizing both the MDE07 and the initial structure of the MDE11. The curatorial team, of which Roca originally was a member, was organized by him and included Nuria Enguita Mayo (Valencia, Spain), Eva Grinstein (Buenos Aires, Argentina) Conrado Uribe (Medellín, Colombia) and myself (Los Angeles, USA).

reminder of the healthy self-doubt that takes over when you undertake something this complex and intensely interconnected. “What is our role in Medellín?” was naturally a central inquiry for the MDE11.

When Roca first called me to discuss this project, the only concept that was on the table was that it should take “education” as a principal area of research. Given the numerous educational programs in the city, it made sense. But education is a very general term that has no guiding trajectory. It is an idea and a signifier that is as open and vague as “art.” Our conversation quickly shifted towards “pedagogy” – a more specific term that implied methodologies of work. When I proposed we start discussing Freire as a possible connecting point, we understood that we were dealing with a very specific and unambiguous methodology with a long history of promoting cultural development in the continent. The shift from education towards pedagogy, and later towards a methodological perspective that was intrinsically tied to emancipatory and community-driven forms or practice, was the turning point for our conversation.

Given the central theme of pedagogy, and a title taken from Paulo Freire’s principle tenet on the emancipatory linkage between teaching and learning (*To Teach and to Learn: Places of Knowledge in Art*), it would only be natural to start to question what art’s pedagogical limits and possibilities in this situation. The discussion was far more fruitful when we did not talk about art, but rather, talked

about the various methodologies and communities art had at its reach in the city. We asked ourselves: What are artists doing now and, more specifically, what are they doing in Medellín? How can we apply this to the logic of the MDE11?

A curatorial perspective on biennials and communities

When the MDE11 took a “pedagogical turn,” so to speak, meaning that the topic of its conceptual emphasis started to be developed around research, knowledge formation, and their respective methodologies, it became clear that Medellín and its years of cultural work done in community had much to offer to the conversation. It was understood from the beginning that to impose other regional intellectual trajectories, however radical they might seem elsewhere, would be a mistake. Imported or translated discourses were no match for what was already happening on the ground there. Any proposals would have to be framed through, and in dialogue with, the context of Medellín, its history and its cultural practices.

The role of the floating, international curator has been much discussed, but rarely is it ever challenged as one that continually magnifies and promulgates the established *linguas franca* of the art world. This is because the role of the curator was defined within a certain historical paradigm of art and aesthetic

theory that we all know can be critical only up to a certain point. Since curation is asked to operate and find meaning within the realm of aesthetic signification, it often can only be critical within that realm.

Social practices, community-based research, dialogical processes and the like are gaining art world attention and one can certainly make the case, as others have done, that biennials have played an important role in creating a platform for this kind of work. This is partly true. The biennial is nimble and temporary and it allows for curatorial structures to potentially be more experimental. The inherent local vs global nature of a biennial's context – at once situated in a city while simultaneously belonging to a global circuit – instantly allows it to create tensions that bring both sides into play while allowing its temporality to set its own limits on what can be done and how much it will cost. But this traditional model also comes at a price. Local communities are rarely engaged on their terms, terms that require a sustained presence and an invested discourse. Curatorial strategies become formulaic, more interested in translating international projects²⁷⁴, safely tucked into the fold of some biennial canon while the museums/institutions that host them are equally pressed to bring what one might call an established “curatorial paradigm” to organize the entire event.

At a time when artists have moved away from accepting the authorial

²⁷⁴ Olga Fernández López, “Just What is it That Makes ‘Curating’ so Different, so Appealing?” *OnCurating.org*, issue 8 (2011): 40. http://www.on-curating.org/issue_08.html

position within their public space art projects, the curator has become increasingly present in authoring biennials and other forms of cultural events. Despite the curator being seen as a mediator between the institution and the public, or even playing a mediating role between the art and the public, it is the curatorial mission that gives biennials their emotional and intellectual weight.²⁷⁵

Biennial formats are still very popular. They reach an increasing number of people and show no sign of decline, but the actuality remains that art – or at least the mainstream version of it – remains outside the purview of what is deemed vital in people’s daily lives. This essential and uncomfortable fact cannot be ignored. To put it in Steven Wright’s words, “one of the most enfeebling accusations with which art is often, implicitly or explicitly, targeted: that it’s not for real; or to put it bluntly, that it’s just art.”²⁷⁶ Wright goes on to argue for complicating the relationship art has with the real world by disengaging it from its ontological definition that has it operating as an analogy of the “mere real thing” and moving it towards a more one-to-one relationship with the world around it.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Michael Brenson. *Acts of Engagement: Writings on Art, Criticism, and Institutions, 1993-2002*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 119.

²⁷⁶ Stephen Wright, “The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade: An Essay on Use-Value and Art-Related Practice,” 16 *Beaver* (2005), <http://www.16beavergroup.org/monday/archives/001496.php>.

²⁷⁷ Wright’s critique of the framing of culture and its usology—or its “use value”—is implemented to designate a condition he calls “the crippling prohibition of usership in art” and the subsequent need of certain practices to “escape” the ideological and ontological capture of *just being art*. This shift towards usology is contingent on how artists in this field develop relationships and strategies for work *outside* the field of art. For numerous reasons artists are working within experimental methodologies that move in and out of the field of art, often having to create functional

This engagement with practices that were working with the communities in the city on a one-to-one scale, was a central concern and point of inquiry for the MDE11.

Politics at the level of linguistic critique clearly distances itself from politics being done on the streets. This is an unfortunate theoretical byproduct of our collective post-'68 disillusionment. By somehow failing at the revolt on the streets, theorists came to the conclusion that true activism could only happen *on* and *within* the text.²⁷⁸ By doing so we, in the art world, have come to accept one form of politics (linguistic) as any other and thusly formed an ineffectual critical paradigm of our own making. By confusing being political in aesthetics with being political within a community, the art world has no way to conceive of an art practice that can do both. It is for all intents and purposes the lingua franca of art. This inability to reconcile the historic tension between poetics and politics, in any meaningful way, has limited our critical zone to the realm of *only* aesthetics, *only* the poetic, *only* the symbolic. If we are to take this situation seriously then, at the very least, for the purposes of examining what an art event focused on critical pedagogy can do in a community, the form and content of curatorial mediation should begin to be questioned.

relationships with groups and organizations working with other modalities. For Wright this is a question of whether art is a useful frame.

²⁷⁸ Kester, "Lessons in Futility," 410.

Additionally, this concern cannot be disconnected from the bigger cultural shifts we see happening around us or the contexts and terms in which we currently work. Medellín must contend with an immense list of questions about its future while it writes (and re-writes) its own tragic and hopeful history, the results of which can be seen in the richness and diversity of current artistic proposals working towards re-signifying the city and its memory in significant ways. Many of the practices engaged with the MDE11 focused on that resignification and the experimental pedagogical practices already in place. Projects ranging from community theater groups Corporación Nuestra Gente greatly enriched by the teachings of Augusto Boal and Freire, or collaborative video and film collectives, such as Corporación Pasolini, engaged in memory recuperation, or a massive network of formal and informal learning centers, music schools and urban study centers dot the map of the city. The challenge at Medellín was not to vaguely center our proposal within a general understanding of “Public” or “Art” but rather to assist in building a structure, as curatorial guests of the city, to inquire, give feedback and enrich on the teaching and learning already happening; to situate these local practices in dialogue with concerns and ideas from other sites and geographies. We needed to find a way where the local vs. global was not just a slogan, but a formula for enriching both; to learn from the projects already happening in the city and share them with others, even if they didn’t fit comfortably within our curatorial model of art.

The Museo de Antioquia, the hosting venue of the MDE11 had been developing programs that promote community-wide and pedagogically intensive practices through a series of initiatives. The *Museo Itinerante* frames the logic and the meaning of the art object within the history and dynamics of specific neighborhoods. The numerous artist-run *corporaciones* in Medellín have been busy operating in specific areas of the city, working in video, theater, or music, and have developed long-standing relationships with their communities as well as with the museum. The network of *parque-bibliotecas* have equally well-established relationships with local community groups and artists and were integrated within the MDE11 programming. That field research was foundational as it was important not to reinvent the wheel for the sake of the “new.”

The fact that these sites of exchange, however temporary, are also central to Habermas’ theory we discussed in chapter three of how public and civic space is developed is no coincidence. The role of oral traditions as a space for learning or the role dialogue and communication plays in the larger community organizing efforts found within Feminism in the United States or Liberatory Pedagogy in Latin America need to be taken into more careful consideration. It is also no coincidence that Medellín has been an important site where these kinds of projects develop. The process of memory recuperation and civic re-signification are not undertakings reserved for any particular kind of cultural actor or identified with any specific political position. Artistic efforts are undertaken in various media

and in any number of settings and communities – many members of those communities have never set foot inside a museum. The crisscrossing of disciplines, media, vocations, and knowledge is not so much an assault on traditional forms of art as it is a survival tactic for cultural actors who wanted to address violence and hopelessness in their city.

Social practices and collaborative methodologies have allowed us a space for reevaluation. And though they have been with us for quite some time, many more artists are investigating new ways to engage public spaces and communities at a pace that was not foreseeable a decade ago. Many projects ground themselves within experimental trans-disciplinary practices that question the tentative and uneasy relationship we, in the art world, have with expanding the parameters of aesthetic theory. Understandably, for many of us, this brings up certain political and theoretical ghosts from the past, while the risk of losing art to some other discipline keeps hard lines drawn in the sand.

Theory of the self and the community

Community as a concept is so contested in Western theory that raising it is like opening Pandora's Box. As noted in Chapter 2, when Friedrich Schiller first published *The Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1794, he was lamenting the social

alienation that came with the violence and emerging capital-democratic revolutions in France. His promise that aesthetic education could set humanity free is, to a great extent, still with us today. Terms he coined, such as the play-drive or the aesthetic impulse, have helped individualize the process of self-awareness and development. In Schiller's world - and in that of others like Emmanuel Kant, from whom he borrowed liberally - it is the singular, the individual that through reason must find him/her self. The idea that art and education, and more specifically aesthetic education, is tied to freedom is still a central argument for art's inherent qualities. It is the reason why museums see themselves educational institutions. It is also the reason why art is taken seriously as an area of humanistic study and why, above all else, art is still at its very core, an endeavor in pedagogical study and labor.

In Schiller's time, on the heels of the French Revolution, the notion of *the self* was still in development and since a "public" - our modern understanding of public - can only exist as a collection of autonomous and individual *selves*, we see that the two ideas were intrinsically tied and are born together from the same set of emancipatory preoccupations. But Schiller's conditions are not ours. He lived at a time when the self was, for the most part, subject to someone else - a monarchy - and a king's subject cannot be one's own. Centuries later, political subjectivity faces quite a different set of problems. One only has to consider the current social, economic and ecological urgencies, and those yet to come, to

realize that we in the field of art will be required to radically re-think our *collectivist* game plan. Are there sites where art can make a difference? Where we take the art world and its priorities, and where it will take us, will continue to be intensely debated. Undoubtedly there is much to do, and our current Western mainstream art discourse will have to come to terms with its post-'68 disillusionment, dismantle its Euro-centric borders, reconsider its neo-liberal alliances and classist gatekeepers, and rethink its entrenched apprehensions towards speaking in terms of "we."

There is a difference between this historic, but now universalized, ~~European~~ notion that one owns consciousness individually and alone, as opposed to the notion that one begins a process of consciousness building with others. How one goes about understanding these concepts depends on many things, and one does not need create an either/or dialectic. What is clear is that our understanding of art today is, and has been, greatly impacted by those ideals developed centuries ago. The dream of the autonomous self is as complicated by today's world as the autonomous object of art and understanding and unraveling that individualistic paradigm will require some work. This will not been easy. The art world has historically pitted the progressive individual artist against the conformity of community consensus.²⁷⁹ Grant Kester has pointed out how this mistrust is deeply rooted within aesthetic theory and its historic prioritization of

²⁷⁹ Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*. (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

the “purposelessness” of art - its autonomy. This paradigm requires that the self must be unburdened of politics. S/he must, in fact, be autonomous if s/he is to encounter and learn from the aesthetic experience.²⁸⁰ The trans-disciplinary nature in which many contemporary artists work – many found within the MDE11, working outside the realm of art, in politics and other disciplines, unconcerned with art’s autonomy - immediately comes to mind. The aesthetic paradigm, now centuries old, is still very much in effect, and artists using collaborative and dialogical methodologies have to contend with this history at some level.

One important example is Feminist art that developed in California. The Feminist Art Program established at Cal Arts in Los Angeles in 1971, two years after hiring Allan Kaprow, would be instrumental not only to Kaprow, but to a generation of women artists as they began to establish a feminist methodology of practice. The consciousness-raising sessions he witnessed and later incorporated into his practice,²⁸¹ which later found resonance in other artists’ work, makes us begin to ask if similar tactics found in contemporary dialogically-based art can be read within a similar frame. If we expand out and back in time, we may understand how those consciousness-raising sessions, the use of dialogue in art, and haptic and body-centered learning were actually understood as part of a larger strategy within the civil rights movement that also operated

²⁸⁰ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 160.

²⁸¹ Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk, and Stephanie Rosenthal, *Allan Kaprow: Art As Life* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 49.

within a distinctly decolonizing effort in the work of Paolo Freire. We then begin to see a larger network of ideas and methodologies, one that considers those artistic strategies within the lineage of liberatory pedagogies and philosophies that Freire and others promoted during that historic moment of decolonial struggle.

The methodologies found within dialogical and community-based art in Latin America begin to raise these aforementioned questions in ways that are unique to the region (liberation theology) but that speak to more universal concerns (community-driven decision making). They equally raise questions of the role and priorities have when curating community-based practices within cultural institutions and how one can begin to facilitate those platforms for teaching and learning.

The curator and the community: an inquiry into priorities

This reflection should not be confused with a call to arms to replace existing western paradigms with some essentialist notion of art. Rather, it is a recognition that artistic processes have begun to question how and why we collaborate as communities and individuals. The larger question is, what are we as curators going to do about this development within the practice of art? As

noted earlier, the art world is a wide-open space where many things can happen. Artists working in a collaborative method should be able to practice alongside artists working in their studios. This is not an either/or situation. The fact that collaborative and community driven processes, many found in Medellín and elsewhere, are only just now finding their way into the discursive paradigm of art and theory (not to mention curatorial interest) should be embraced and seen as a teaching and learning opportunity – to consider the re-constitution of a civic space and identity, a re-learning and consciousness-building process that is fundamental to this kind of work and its larger cultural project.

The method by which one taps into this kind of cultural work is where curatorial methodologies come into play. Being aware of what the city of Medellín could give us requires a sustained form of research, a dialogically-based presence within various communities that is not easy to maintain in this kind of biennial platform, where one is working outside the host city for a great deal of the planning period. This focus on time and sustained work is not without its demands. Apart from the practical difficulties commitment implies, it also requires us to question Modernity's focus on and privileging of ideas as an artistic act in and of itself - *art as idea as idea*. Ideas can be easy to come by and conceptualism's staying power, despite the brevity of many of its gestures, is testament to the facility with which the art world's economy turns over new ideas and new works of art with considerable speed. It certainly can be argued that

today this conceptual privilege of the “new idea” has something to do with a certain entrepreneurial spirit or “cognitive economy” that we misguidedly value above all else.²⁸² Not coincidentally, this entrepreneurial mind-set, requires a skill-set perfectly matched for curatorial work, banking its future on managing data and producing new bits of information.

A related inquiry is the history of the curatorial act as a gesture - a model inherited from Modernism’s affinity for the speech act and the artistic enunciation as a linguistic metaphor. In this model, as mentioned above, art and other forms of cultural actions are seen through the lens of linguistic criticism and so everything is discursive, everything is speech, and every political or social action is inescapably wrapped within the critique of language and its power to frame the world. All social action (speech) is unable to operate unless it is thoroughly critiqued because action - and speech - is always, a priori an operation of power. This makes any form of collaborative or community action nearly impossible. A very different use of language than the model Freire has posited.

Returning to the role of the curator, we foresee that a priority placed on dialogue and listening could have important implications for curatorial methodologies. Apart from requiring more time, being present requires a variety

²⁸² Ultra-red, “Art, Collectivity, and Pedagogy: Changing the World in which We Live,” *Chto Delat* 08-32 (2011): 16, http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=234&Itemid=414&lang=en.

of different skill-sets. It requires spending a great deal of time visiting and building relationships with various actors in the city, not just artists, but the various communities, sites and organizations that frame their work. This kind of contact and conversation rarely happens at the curatorial level, partly because there is no time for it. Museums and foundations that sponsor these events do not have the resources or the time to fund this kind of research. The other reason is that curators have never really worked that way. Contemporary art has never really required such sustained dialogue with a local site. The dialogical practices we are examining here may very well force us to change that.

This new form of curatorial inquiry requires understanding that the formation of knowledge has a learning curve that is equally based on knowing what is in a community (time) as it is based on learning how artists operate there (methodology). We will invariably have to learn this new form of curating once again from artists - and that's the way it should be. As curators we must always remember, despite our ever-growing influence, that our curatorial methodologies have to be aligned with the artists we work with. Despite the institutional and professional challenges this may imply, it cannot be any other way.

Reflections on the MDE11 and its structure

When asked by Jose Roca to be a part of this curatorial team, I was looking forward to the opportunity to work with such a talented group of people both within and outside the museum. Artists, writers, teachers, administrators, organizers – all have played an important role in shaping the MDE11.

When we began the discussions two years ago of how we wanted to define the MDE11, it became clear that certain aspects and relationships from the MDE07 had to stay. The *Espacios Anfitriones* program that invited Medellín based residency spaces to host international ones, for example was a success in that it generated a network of collaboration amongst independent art spaces in Latin America that is still active today. Other elements weren't as appropriate for this version as we focused on learning and pedagogy. So we set about organizing a three-part structure (*Laboratorio, Estudio, Exposición*) that gave us the freedom to build off and develop these three central categories.

An important consideration, given our varied curatorial backgrounds, was that we did not want to create an oppositional dialectic that positioned one kind of practice or methodology against another. This would not have been useful to anyone, and art is a big enough camp to accommodate them all. What strove to carve out a space where the theme of “teaching and learning” could be considered from various perspectives. We also wanted to push the pedagogical metaphor as far as possible through exhibition formats (*Taller Central*), extended

research periods in the city (*Trabajo de Campo*), experimental collaborations with other local organizations (*Interlocuciones*), and lectures and workshops (*Aula Dialógica* and *Taller de Construcción*). Through these structures, we could move away from the either/or ghetto and begin to think about what one form of cultural work could learn from another. An investigation in one area of the MDE11 was encouraged to find its way into other areas and formats of working. For example, a concept that drives a project in the exhibition is also investigated in a panel discussion. It is then a point of inquiry for artists in the city, and later a strategy shared with collaborators that then gets presented back to the public for discussion, and the cycle goes on.

The MDE11 as previously mentioned, had to be based both conceptually and curatorially on local artistic methodologies taking into consideration how pedagogy was being practiced and redefined everyday in Medellín. The topic of study might be universal, but its form and application is not. One of the critiques of Relational Aesthetics is that it isn't critical of the post-Fordist informational and sociability economy – how it feeds into the way our very relationships are being marketed back to us – or of sociability as a medium or a field of capital investment. From my perspective, one of the reasons this critique has taken hold so strongly is that many art organizations and events have followed suit in riding the “sociability” wave. This is partly the reason that public practices (many of them working out a counter-logic to this marketed-sociability template) have

gotten the global art circuit's attention. It's also one of the many reasons why the MDE11 needed to take a clear position on what it was trying to achieve. Thus, it was important not to confuse representations of the social for the dialogical work being done by artists to generate new social fabrics.

There is one key example of how this curatorial problem was addressed. The issue of not having enough time to commit to a more sustained curatorial presence could not have been easily anticipated. That is because the organizers were not aware of the *kind of event* we were planning beforehand, but after a few trips to Medellín I began to identify some key relationships that the museum had with key community groups. I also started to understand that the community-driven work of the various *corporaciones* in Medellín were a litmus test to what was happening in the city. The mediums of video, music, and theater were identified as vital areas of activity. Given the museum's ongoing relationships with Corporación Nuestra Gente (theater), Corporación Pasolini (video), and Territorio Sonoro (music) it made sense to ask them to act as interlocutors between their community of supporters and their broader network and the curatorial team. We asked the three interlocutors to invite 3 other groups in their respective media – for a total of nine - and for each group to present their work in the Aula Dialogica as part of the MDE11. It was an attempt to have collectives and *corporaciones* who have never had a relationship with the museum or the mainstream art world to be a part of the conversation. These presentations would

then be followed up with the group opening their sites/spaces in the city for programming of their choosing as part of the MDE11.

If the artists, the city and its discourse had benefited from the Museo de Antioquia developing key relationships before the MDE11, then it only made sense that the MDE11 try to incorporate these relationships into its programming platform, particularly given the pedagogical nature of these interactions. This program was a way to have both the museum and the MDE11 open its doors to a new community, while asking these other independent groups to do the same. Both sides opening its doors to one another, building new relationships, and learning from one another. It seems clear to me that the work of these *corporaciones* are as much about things the art world could openly and confidently debate as it was about things it has very real problems discussing - from art's role in remaking civic discourses and art as a site for re-modeling nonviolent forms of consciousness building to inquiries into the city's educational infrastructure and its pedagogical traditions and histories.

Case Study: La Piel de la Memoria /The Skin of Memory

Does it seem plausible to reimagine a biennial, even one with a long historic relationship as the MDE11 and the Medellin Biennials, that asks us to

consider this lineage of cultural history in the city? The MDE11 was not focused on revisiting CELAM 2. It took on the history of CELAM 2 with panels on Liberatory Pedagogies, inviting several key participants from the 1968 bishops conference, including conferences dealing with the history violence that brought key theorists and artists who had worked in this field to the table.

One key project was the “revisiting” of an influential art project that took place in the Medellín neighborhood of Barrio Antioquia in 1998, Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño’s *La Piel de la Memoria* (The Skin of Memory). The project was done in cooperation with a team of organizations and collaborators and concluded with a series of public events including a museum/installation within a traveling bus of collected objects of mourning and memory. It concluded with a procession/performance within Barrio Antioquia.

If CELAM and the first Medellín biennial emerged from the political unrest of the 50s and 60s, *The Skin of Memory* was firmly entrenched within a period of intense social violence in the 80s and 90s. The end of the 1980s saw the rise of rise of leftist guerrillas such as the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, or National Liberation Army) as well as right-wing paramilitary groups such as the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia or United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia). Forced displacement and political

assassinations were coupled with indiscriminate acts of terror that were captured on the evening television news. This crisis was worsened thanks to Colombia's strategic position and rich agricultural resources where organized crime and the U.S.-led "war on drugs," became the vehicles where more violence would emerge via the drug trade. Billions of U.S. dollars in foreign aid and military support only seemed to exacerbate the problem, as violence and displacement skyrocketed throughout the 80s and 90s, punctuated by the killing of Pablo Escobar in Medellín in 1993. It was in this context of a society that was not yet post-conflict, but living a conflict on a daily basis, that *The Skin of Memory* was being situated. It was also situated within the context of a society that had lived through decades of sustained violence. As Lacy and Riaño state:

When societies go through prolonged periods of violent conflict that drain away the taken-for-granted texture of everyday life, collective anxieties leave an emotional sediment that might turn into hate and vengeful actions and reaffirm the ideologies that sustain these behaviors. The social fabric gradually weakens, the intimate and ritual mechanisms for negotiating grief block, and the debilitating impact of violence in the psychological, social and cultural spheres intensifies.²⁸³

My personal experience with this project began early on in my capacity as co-curator of the MDE11. While speaking to various community-based artists in Medellín during that research period between 2009 and 2010, I found that a story

²⁸³ Suzanne Lacy & Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, "The Skin of Memory Revisited," in *Collective Situations*, forthcoming.

began to unfold in which many mid-career artists and researchers held *The Skin of Memory* as a central reference in their development. Because it had unfolded 12 years earlier, in a Medellín that was very different from the one they were presently living, it was easy to imagine how the project could have highlighted a series of artistic possibilities to a then younger and developing group of artists and activists. There was a palpable sense of excitement that was shared with me when news came that Lacy and Riaño would return and revisit, in some way, the initial project. Community memory and local history were already on the table with regard to the MDE11's *The Skin of Memory Revisted*. We will return to this historiographic context momentarily.

In 1999, Medellín, and Barrio Antioquia in particular, were suffering from the effects of violence on various fronts. It was not only international news that then affected the citizens' own conception of their city, but also the violence itself, perpetuated at a very local level – in one's own neighborhood – that was to be addressed by the artists. In the 90s, Medellín, the second largest city in Colombia, had famously become the most dangerous city in the world.²⁸⁴ As the war became an international media sensation, even within Colombia, it was important to consider memory within the local specificity of the barrio and the family. It began, as Riaño states, by taking into account the history of a

²⁸⁴ By 1991, the city of Medellín was showing a much bleaker picture, reaching a rate of 381 homicides per 100,000 people (Corporación Región 1999).

neighborhood marked by violence and exclusion and responded to the sense of discontinuity by “using art, ritual and commemoration.”²⁸⁵

In 1998, Lacy was already a preeminent artist in the field of what was then called *Public Art*. Riaño was the Colombian anthropologist who had been working in Barrio Antioquia. *The Skin of Memory* began in 1998 when Riaño and five local community organizations invited Lacy to create a project on the topics already being developed on Riaño’s fieldwork on social reconstruction. The groups brought together had experience and knowledge from various backgrounds, including groups of youth, architects, a team of historians, social workers, artists, and educators.²⁸⁶

The project began by working with local youth and women from the neighborhood to collect 500 objects that symbolized the memories of Barrio Antioquia. The object collectors became witnesses and scribes of the histories, memories, and, most importantly, the emotions and associations that were shared along with the objects themselves. The object collectors aimed to

²⁸⁵ Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, “Encounters with Memory and mourning: Public Art as a collective pedagogy of reconciliation” in *Public Acts: Curriculum and Desires of Social Change*, ed. Erica Meiners and Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco. (London: Routledge, 2004). 212.

²⁸⁶ For the original *Skin of Memory* project (1998-99), the team also included historian Mauricio Hoyos in charge of production. The project’s coordinating team and workers in the local organizations were William Alvarez, Jorge García, Juan Vélez and Angela Velásquez. Five key organizations which supported and funded it were the *Secretaría de Educación de Medellín* (Education Secretariat of Medellín), the *Caja de Compensación Familiar* (COMFENALCO) and two non-governmental organizations, *Corporación Región* and *Presencia Colombo Suiza*. See Lacy and Riaño-Alcalá, “The Skin of Memory Revisited,” in *Collective Situations*, forthcoming.

establish close relationships with those they visited, allowing them to share stories and memories through the objects. Both parties were members of the same barrio. The donor invited the collector into their home. In sharing and receiving these objects and stories tied to the passing of a loved one, both parties engaged in active memory work, helping “establish a relationship between the object, the place it occupies in their material world and the ways in which it establishes a link with the past.”²⁸⁷ The objects occupy a certain presence that recalls the words of Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña when she recalls the experience of absence, familiar in many countries in Latin America, of hearing that which has not been heard: “oír lo no oído.” The objects here become agents for memory or hearing what is no longer being heard, and as such, the stories – an oral tradition of sharing these objects within families – were carefully recorded.

The objects were shared/installed in a bus transformed into a museum of memory that moved throughout the neighborhood. The process of reflecting and mourning the past was a significant step for the participants. As Riaño states:

The objects transformed the museum into a dynamic site of individual and collective memories, in a place that paid tribute to the people of the barrio, but also unveiled the conflictive and dispute-oriented character of the local memories. Brushstrokes of memory about national events that survive within family life became evident, along with the connections between local conflicts and macro social

²⁸⁷ Lacy & Riaño-Alcalá, “The Skin of Memory Revisited” in *Collective Situations*, forthcoming.

processes, such as the political violence of the 1950s, the global market of illicit drugs, the policies of urban planning and social exclusion.²⁸⁸

The bus/museum was further useful as a metaphor for crossing both the physical boundaries that were made impossible by the violence that was demarcating the barrio, as well as the crossing of symbolic boundaries that displaced violence for peace. As the artist stated: “The bus offered a place for the transformation of the acts of looking and remembering into acts of recognizing. A receptacle of living and daily memory, it represented a sensorial texture, *a skin of memory* – seen, felt and re-symbolized for each one of its visitors.”²⁸⁹ The object collector turned scribe was, during the exhibition, turned into a “guardian of the artwork” and given the responsibility of relating stories of the objects and their background. According to the artists, a local journalist perceptively identified their task as being that of an “archeologist of the everyday.”²⁹⁰

The bus installation had the objects installed with “a candlelight aura of ritual underscoring the magnitude of loss” in which viewers contemplated objects that reached back into the community’s history but also threaded a larger narrative that was both national and international, where links could be drawn by the community between the historical importance of these objects and their

²⁸⁸ Riaño-Alcalá, “Encounters with Memory,” 214.

²⁸⁹ Lacy and Riaño-Alcalá, “The Skin of Memory Revisited” in *Collective Situations*, forthcoming.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

significance in telling their own local stories (Figure 4). This installation-specific web of relations was echoed in the process-specific web of relations and participation of local youth, collaborations with NGOs, and “embedding of art within a wider process of community organization and civic pedagogy.”²⁹¹ This consistent echoing of local and larger storytelling narratives, in the installation as well as in the organizing process with the dialogical aspects of the practice within various levels of the community (local youth as well as regional NGOs) was a foundational aspect of *The Skin of Memory* embedding itself within the city.

In collecting these memories and creating a platform for dialogical reflection and recognition of shared memories and conflicts, the *Skin of Memory* had an interest in eliciting a “collective civic pedagogy” that supported critical thinking with regard to the connections between violence and the destruction of social life. But the project was not intended to work alone or in isolation from the already existent production of local, democratic processes by communities already working with thinkers, *corporaciones*, community leaders, and artists towards “strengthening civil society.” As the artists state: “An early work of community-activist public art in Colombia, the project grew out of, and subsequently was reabsorbed into, the ongoing production of a civil society in that country.”²⁹² As news coverage of the project grew, and the 10-day bus

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

exhibit crisscrossed various neighborhoods, with over 4,000 visitors/witnesses helping spread the news about the event in an act of urban resignification.

This quality of emergence and subsequent reabsorption into civic life was later echoed in the 2011 revisitation of the *Skin of Memory* project, which similarly incorporated two central components: the installation and the public gathering. The installation was a museum-specific installation eliciting the history of that original moment of reconciliation in 1998, including news clippings of the project and current video testimonials by those who had originally participated (Figure 5). The intimacy of the objects were installed using low-level lights recalling candles to elicit the same contemplation and reverence found within the original bus installation. The public forum was a gathering of the original *Skin of Memory* participants, now 12 years older and wiser, to greet each other and engage in a public conversation in the atrium courtyard of the Museo de Antioquia during the inauguration of the MDE11. This public conversation was framed and promoted as a part of the formal lecture series of the biennial. The community gathering was intentionally private, despite the fact that it was held in the public courtyard. Those who were not part of that community were invited to listen to video pieces recorded and dispersed around the perimeter of the courtyard and to witness the gathering of old friends.

Former children now grown, public intellectuals now working internationally, a youth leader who had gone to college to become a

sociologist, another who had started her own catering business, some with children of their own, one recently murdered, a reporter who had become mayor, an electrician who constructed the bus museum and a mime who gave out letters, an NGO leader now the director of the government's House of Memory museum—all reflected on the changes, lessons and legacies from the past twelve years. Observers were invited to join the conversation, to move from their position in the surrounding corridors to enter the conversational and learning space of *The Skin of Memory Revisited*.²⁹³

After an extended period for the reception, the *Skin of Memory* inner circle began to take their seats for the more formal group conversation. At that point, the public and invited art-world guests, including participating artists and theorists attending the MDE11 inauguration and public events, were allowed to enter the atrium and sit amongst the participants for the formal beginning of the conversation (Figure 6).

As Riaño and Lacy indicate, *The Skin of Memory Revisited* was not intended to focus on the earlier work, but instead to examine the contested terrain of memory and the ongoing social and ethical relations that were set in motion through the earlier work. Equally, the video installations both in the galleries and circling the courtyard, focused on the continuities between past and present conditions of memory work in the space of continued violence. What

²⁹³ Ibid.

happened in the past 12 years, both in the lives of those who participated as well as the community efforts to abate the violence?

Scholar Gertrude James Gonzalez de Allen cites five essential characteristics to memory and memory work with regard to the de/colonial context. For people who have been the historic victims of oppression, the questions of how subjectivity is asserted when your existence is denied, both discursively and potentially bodily, are paramount. Gonzalez de Allen's five characteristics include: 1) the act of remembering, 2) the act of performing the past, 3) the process of conscientization 4) the study and establishment of discourses with "other theoretical traditions" and, 5) acknowledging the act of erasure imposed by colonial systems.²⁹⁴ Seen in this way, we are reminded that memory is, and has been, a historic tool of resistance to alienation within colonized and oppressed communities. In this context, according to Gonzalez de Allen, to engage memory is "to recall, not only aspects of the self, but also to search for other existing conversations that recognize and engage one's existence and way of being in the world...For these reasons, memory is an essential source of the self."²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Gertrude James Gonzalez de Allen, "Enrique Dussell and Manuel Zapata Olivelli: An Exploration of De-Colonial, Diasporic, and Trans-modern Selves and the Politics of Recognition" in *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise*, ed. Nelson Maldonado-Torres. (Fall, 2006): 1.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

This act of working in memory has important ramifications for the dialogically-driven cultural practices in Latin America that are evident if one considers the history of violence that has only recently begun to be addressed through legislation, as is the case nationally in Colombia, or in the case of centers of memory, as in the numerous cases of museums of memory throughout the hemisphere. *The Skin of Memory* was one early project that addressed the importance of consciousness raising through memory work and art, and it did its work operating at the local level within the community, both dialogically and discursively. Yet it understood that it was acting in conjunction with larger cultural and reconstruction movements:

The project placed the *local* (the barrio, the city) as the primary social and spatial context for witnessing and it suggested witnessing as a way to recover qualities of trust and close relationships in the everyday and to create a context for an engagement in broader societal reconciliation acts.

The *Skin of Memory* emphasized the importance of thinking about social repair as a gradual process of civic literacy supported by cultural interventions that reconstruct the bonds of neighborhood, of friendship, or of family weakened by so many acts of violence. It demonstrated the importance of a symbolic legitimation of the claims made by those who suffer, and the ways in which historic memories have a decisive influence on relationships that individuals have with the present. These elements also play a central role in the national negotiation processes when they are turned into one of the bases from which the diverse actors, including the State, define and negotiate their positions.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Lacy and Riaño-Alcalá, "The Skin of Memory Revisited" in *Collective Situations*, forthcoming.

The act of historicizing this project will be an ongoing concern, as historiography, in general, is complicated in Colombia. As noted earlier, there was very little research and writing during this conflicted period of the 90s about Colombian community-based art practices. This is partly due to the fact that these practices have historically been aligned with the social sciences, and thusly not examined as “art” practices, an argument covered in chapter two. Another reason is the obvious social rupture that happens during intense moments of violence, as noted by Gutierrez Castañeda above, that gives rise to large gaps in institutional support for culture just when it needs it most. Yet *The Skin of Memory* seemed to anticipate what artists in this field understand clearly: the mainstream art world has had other priorities.

During the curatorial negotiations in 2011, it was clear after conversations with Lacy and Riaño that having the *The Skin of Memory* community conversation take place publicly, both as a performance, but also as a conversation that was part of the MDE11’s public lecture series was strategic. The lecture series called the *Aula Dialogica, or* Dialogical Hall, was a site where artists and theorists were invited to give formal presentations on their practice. As Lacy and Riaño noted: “Held during the *Aula Dialogica*, artists and critics attending the conference witnessed this community as it knowingly reconstituted itself to celebrate and to claim their role as cultural producers within the museum itself.” The earlier 1999 project worked exclusively with municipal funds (with

more raised by NGOs), as was the case with the host institution Corporación Región.²⁹⁷ But this later 2011 revisit was sponsored entirely by an art museum and, more specifically, an art biennial. Lacy, a seasoned veteran of the art world circuit, understanding how *The Skin of Memory* had influenced a generation of social practitioners (many whom now called themselves “artists” in Medellín), grasped this historic transition and insisted on this discursive frame.

Perhaps this transition into the art world signals a shift in how the public, and perhaps the art world at large, is opening itself up to these kinds of practices. This shift in the frame also challenges the practitioners to understand how this relationship will continue to evolve and encourage them to shape the frame to their advantage. It also points to how a practice historically framed by the social sciences can open a space and a new landscape of possible engagements within an art context. It certainly helps to have a famous artist at the helm of the project, but the translation from one realm of action (the streets of Barrio Antioquia) to another (the galleries of the Museo de Antioquia) is not so much a translation of the project as a varied set of re-framing exercises that allowed for one realm of action to enforce the other. By this I mean that not only was a historic dialogical methodology involving numerous community groups and NGOs, a form of cultural practice that happens innumerably in Latin America

²⁹⁷ Support was from Municipality of Medellín, Corporación Región, the Corporación Presencia Colombo-Suiza (The Colombian-Swiss Presence Corporation) and the Caja de Compensación Familiar Comfenalco (Family Compensation Fund Comfenalco).

outside of the artworld's purview, framed front and center during an art biennial. There was also a strong representational element in the form of an installation, together with video works, documentary clippings and news from the period and a shelf display system installed to recall those in the ambulatory bus-museum. There was also the inaugural conversation that was framed as a performative dialogue. But the importance here was that it did not solely rely on the representation of that methodology, it equally banked on the community, their dialogue and rich textured involvement and historic knowledge, and their continued learning, to be placed front and center. This community framing occurred on two levels, on the one hand they were the ones to materialized it, and on the other the artist made sure those metaphorical materializations were targeted back to them; a true "call and response" relationship between the artist and their community collaborators. For example, in the installation Lacy and Riaño created an intimate environment recalling the original bus-museum for the community's own critical reflection on what had happened in their lives over the preceding years. Historic and contemporary conversations with many of those involved were seen in video projections retelling the history the project and the barrio. Those voices interspersed with those of researchers and others framing the project, its methodologies and its influence in new ways. Many of those who had participated had gone on to be deeply involved in the field, some in the political realm, some became academics, others were high ranking advocates within other sister organizations. Many stayed in the community and continued

the work they had started. The MDE11 was a moment to have them hear their own voice speaking back through time. It operated democratically, open to anyone willing to spend time with the materials, but it was strategically focused for the community to understand its own actions in a new way, and for the biennial to see them, as cultural producers, not just activists.

This division that seems to operate in the shallow waters of art criticism seemingly intent on defining what is actually art and what is merely politics. These two shifts in the discursive frame; an art practice studied by the social sciences now operating within the art world's purview and a community (and a biennial) seeing that work as cultural production, not just activism are closely related. They both reveal two historic links to the past. The first link was that the *Revisit* recognized that this kind of practice has been historically studied by the social sciences and not art historians and chose to directly place the practice in the site of art theory's investigation – a biennial's lecture series. That small act brought the various specialists and social actors that were brought up within the community, now twelve years later, to be in conversation with specialists and cultural actors within the art realm. The second historic link it produced was the recognition that the dialogically-centered cultural work that was produced was in line with the pedagogical traditions and lineages we have been outlined in this dissertation. Even though there was no mention of Liberation Theology or of CELAM in *The Skin of Memory Revisited*, there was an understanding that the

theoretical and methodological tradition, one that Lacy was well aware of as a leading artist associated with Feminist art practices, was anchoring the project within a field and history of practices in the region. Lacy in particular understood that these social practices require an art framing and research that has not been easily forthcoming. Being a theorist and professor of social practices, she like many of the artists who have sought out interlocution from art theory know that it is easy to dismiss these practices as being merely politics. The successful framing of *The Skin of Memory Revisited* was achieved not only by bringing it to an international art biennial, it was by foregrounding the complexity of the dialogue and memory work – the foundation for civic reimagining as a model for cultural and artistic action.

* * *

This case study as a curator working with community-based practices within an institutional platform of a biennial has to be understood in relation to the practices themselves. The case studies are also, not coincidentally, case studies I have been involved in to some degree, either as an early interlocutor or in a curatorial capacity. Rather than see this as a source of curatorial compromise, I wish to convey that curatorial practice is one of the only ways that it is possible for an independent researcher to gain a direct, first-hand knowledge of these complex, long-term projects. As noted above, this kind of field research is

essential to a deeper critical, as well as curatorial, understanding of the work. I would never had access to the intimate conversations and negotiations that occurred with the community had it not been for this research avenue that been opened to me via my role as curator and researcher.

These practices are slowly making their way into art world conversations. Evidence of this is clearly seen in the number of funding and support organizations that are investing in the practices. But these practices are not new, even if the conversation center around new social and political developments. Given the central position that pedagogical strategies occupy in many of the contemporary practices we refer to today as Social Practice, it is no wonder that there are questions that emerge around the history of earlier pedagogical practices. There is much work left to be done in this field, but there is reason for optimism. The crisis in our educational institutions raise concerns, in a reflexive manner, on the possibilities of critical education and the strategies employed in the practices themselves. The following conclusion asks some key questions about the role pedagogy plays in contemporary Social Practice and the role and methodology of research that they require.

Conclusion

Art, Pedagogy and Dialogue moving forward

What I have attempted to describe in these pages relates a form of dialogue, learning, and cultural production that is firmly rooted in a tradition and an alternative lineage from the Americas – Latin America, more precisely. Liberation Theology, like Latin American cultural thought in general, has an early dialogue with Europe, but then becomes something uniquely American, reflecting a centuries-long cycle of relating to the Old World: reception, dialogue, adaption, and resistance moving towards emancipation. Given the long colonial history that continued in subsequent, more modern forms after Spanish rule, the Catholic Church's role in Latin America is replete with contradictions and paradoxes.

Beginning with the changes Rome implemented through the passage of Vatican II, activists and intellectuals in Latin America – clergy and lay communities alike – began to reimagine a new form of teaching the faith, as well as subsequent ways of communicating with the various peoples of the Americas. The conditions and requirements to reach disparate and all too often oppressed communities required a new form of dialogue that spoke to an emerging awareness of the historic injustices still in play, both structurally within society as well as liturgically within the Church's teachings. The analysis of larger social

injustices attributed to unfettered capitalism within Vatican II was responding to a slow-brewing movement within the Church and was accentuated during the global political movements taking place during Vatican II. The direct and unambiguous language found in documents such as *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) signaled the changes to come:

The council, considering the immensity of the hardships which still afflict the greater part of mankind today, regards it as most opportune that an organism of the universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.²⁹⁸

The need to promote international social justice required an important shift in the way that the Church understood and articulated faith and sin. The concept of a “structural sin” was foregrounded as a way to see, judge, and act on modern structural problems such as widespread poverty or political violence. The argument made by many Latin American theologians for understanding sin as a large societal issue and not exclusively a personal one was foundational in the development of Liberation Theology as a theological movement, not just a political movement.

²⁹⁸ “Gaudium et Spes” *The Holy See Archives*, paragraph 90.

As noted in the previous chapters, these theological shifts contributed to an emerging hemispheric awareness of larger societal problems fueled to some degree by the opening Vatican II provided through its own *aggiornamento*, but mainly driven by social science research and experimental forms of dialogical pedagogy by Latin American thinkers and practitioners. The research centers and the ecclesiastical base communities that were developed throughout the decade of the 60s and 70s were the backbone of the Liberation Theology movement. The research provided the data to learn and justify the development of new pedagogical initiatives and experimental forms of learning. But the embodied knowledge that comes from practices that were being developed on the ground, within communities, was the methodologies that were situated front and center in the field of action.

Structural sin as a theological development led directly to a structural critique of the prevailing economic models that were understood to be the root causes of much oppression in the region. The critique of *Desarollismo* was formally framed within dependency theory, which stated that underdevelopment was a structural inequality that had less to do with backwardness than it did with dependency built on the massive exploitation of exportation of raw goods and natural materials for the purposes of enriching international centers of production and their local allies.

These theoretical and theological developments aimed at structural oppression – or in the language of liberation theology, structural sin - coincide with a large global decolonizing movement known as post-coloniality, based on social justice in the third world. Those early movements, situated within the former European colonies of Southeast Asia, Africa and the emerging Arab states, quickly incorporated Cuba and its socialist revolution as a site for interlocution. Despite early post-colonial theoretical ties to Marxism and its focus on state-led emancipation through socialism, and the adamant refusal on the part of most activists within the Liberation Theology movement to associate directly with Marxism, their use of economic critique through dependency theory is decisively indebted to Marxist critical theory. As noted in chapter 3, the priests and the contemporary artists, whom today seem to follow similar methodological paths are both accused of working primarily in politics while their respective fields, theology and art seem to be subsumed under the banner of political agitation. This unfair accusation seems to emerge more from a distrust of community collaboration and organizing efforts than it does the originality and rigor found within the practice itself.

The early elaboration of post-coloniality as movement dedicated to the post-colonial state's development of emancipatory economic models gave way to a second wave that moved away from armed or legislative political struggles. That second wave moved towards a struggle based on post-structural political

and linguistic critique, firmly basing itself on theoretical work within academia. This latter model, as discussed in chapter 1, carries an inherent distrust of community-led cultural efforts. It is for this reason that this dissertation takes the position that the latter post-colonial theoretical model academia has inherited is insufficient in understanding a form of cultural work based on what Freire called praxis, defined by the singular term action-reflection covered in chapter three. He explains:

Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interconnection that if one is sacrificed-even in part-the other immediately suffers.²⁹⁹

The dialogical methodologies found within many of the community-based learning programs developed within or coterminously alongside those espoused by Liberation Theology are inherently difficult to frame within post-structural theory. This is so because what is learned, and how one learns, is so structurally different than what can be gleaned from a theoretical paradigm based on linguistic critique, rather than how language actually operates within an intersubjective community process directed towards collective political action. It is this bifurcated development – social sciences and pedagogy in Latin America following dialogical practices and post-structuralism taking hold within the north-Atlantic channel – that explains why so many of the cultural practices we

²⁹⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

recognize today as being inheritors of the former tradition have been and are currently being firmly studied and understood within the social sciences.

This lack of art-world dialogue raises several issues moving forward. One key question I have raised here pertains to the role art institutions and their curators will play in creating a space for these practices, given the unique working conditions they require. The contemporary challenge to work within or without the system of art and its support structure is a long-drawn-out battle that has its roots in early modernism. Artist projects and collectives today that set out to develop a "public" presence, either through developing independent art spaces or projects within the public sphere are asked to think critically about the "site" and its "specificity" – language that resembles that of public sculpture. The fact that such a term does exist – social sculpture – begs us to consider what social and artistic forms are being created by the artist. The term, popularized by Joseph Beuys, along with his axiom "everyone is an artist," seeks to form new relations towards a new body-politic.

By 1971, Joseph Beuys told critic Achille Bonito Oliva he was losing interest in art.

“Q. It seems to me that your work is the extending of a kind of 'Socratic space' in which the works are no more than a pretext for dialogue with the individual.

“A. This is the most important side of my work. The rest – objects, drawings, actions – all take second place. Basically I'm not that much connected to art. Art interests me only in so far as it gives me the possibility of dialogue with individuals.”

The issue here lies in the fact that the art itself was sculptural only in that the dialogue was used to form something – in this case a living sculptural form of political bodies. If everyone were an artist, we would all participate in this formation: "A social organism as a work of art." There seems to be little attention to the forms and conditions through which this dialogue occurred or of the power of collaborative work in creating new ethical dimensions within those who participated. In any case, the model for how art engages the public seems to be a troublesome duality of complete political devotion (i.e. that of Beuys), seen today as complete naiveté, or a critical distance that allows the artist to be removed enough to recognize and critique the lifeworld's limitations.

As Grant Kester has pointed out in reference to what he calls an agonistic model of art, this space of critical distance must be maintained in order for the artist to properly critique the world; it also somewhat parallels the distance the art

object needs to properly shock or confuse the viewer into the correct form of incomplete, estranged subjectivity.³⁰⁰

Thus it is logical that this agonistic model found within post-structuralism is the position occupied by artists when engaging public projects. Thomas Hirschhorn's widely cited 2002 *Bataille Monument* at Documenta 11 was instructive. The international exhibition in Kassel saw residents of a Turkish suburb build, install and invigilate a series of eight makeshift shacks, including a library with a topography of Bataille's work, a television studio, and a snack bar. Like many of his team-based projects, the emphasis was on social investigation, leading an audience beyond that of the gallery-attending public to find out about art and politics for themselves, using the artist's ideas as a framework. At no point was there a concern with doing any community organizing or dialogue beyond the needs of the installation. As he has publicly stated, "I'm not a social worker."³⁰¹ And yet the site of a poor immigrant community was crucial to the reception of the work, as visitors were required to travel there on their own and uneasily enter a community that was outside the art world's purview. That uneasiness, that sense of displacement, is a key factor reflecting a theoretical tradition that is focused on viewers' discomfort for the purpose of proper ethical

³⁰⁰ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 87.

³⁰¹ Alison Gingeras, "Striving to be Stupid: A Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn," *Art Press* 239 (October 1998): 20.

realignment, and critique above dialogue. The specificity of space and the de-centering of our sense of belonging is central to the post-structural paradigm.

The fact that dialogically driven community-based practices are reaching new heights in popularity within a previously ambivalent art system speaks to a necessary institutional reaction to what artists and other cultural actors are practicing. But their popularity also speaks to larger political and methodological issues that seem to be addressed directly by these forms of practices, regardless of one's knowledge of their intellectual lineage.

One key question will be how one studies such forms and what tools researchers will carry with them in their toolbox. Current debates and theories anchored in contemporary art can certainly help, but as this dissertation suggests, that will only go so far in relation to Latin America. Researchers will need to take on more experimental and cross-disciplinary forms of research while also opening themselves to not only being present within the practice, but participating in it to some degree. As noted earlier, unless one is linked to a university or research position – occupations that are increasingly rare – one's options are limited in the kinds of experiences that can support that sort of sustained research. Why is participation important to the research experience, as opposed to just observing? There are forms of knowledge that become embodied knowledge when one collaborates. Herein lies a challenge.

In Richard Sennett's influential 2006 book *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, the author takes up Franco Birardi's position that the broken social contract and our subsequent identification with our labor has led to new social relations. But Sennett also looks at the changing nature of business to employee relationships to map out the shifts in our own relationships to time and labor. In short, modern capitalism has no use for the previous military-like pyramidal hierarchy of corporate structures where workers built life-long relationships. Today, businesses require workers to continually prove their worth, and this uncertainty in the face of obsolescence requires a more creative problem-solving workforce eschewing the wasteful obsessions of "getting the job done right."

Books such as Matthew Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft* from 2009, or Sennett's 2008 follow-up, entitled simply *Craftsmanship*, seem to point to a condition where the manual skills we all depend on are not only frowned upon, but are in short supply. These authors seem to echo a larger concern that our educational priorities – both in public schools and in the workplace – not only reinforce the stigma, but have taken the language and pedagogical opportunities out of manual labor. In the face of this emerging condition of new "cognitive capitalism" and labor/social relations that favor potential over actual material production, we can look back to see how the cognitive and the linguistic have been privileged in everything from the dismantling of high school shop classes to

the development of SAT exams to self-help books for parents wanting to prepare children for the "high tech global future."³⁰² All this is to say that the conditions of how we work, what we learn so that we can work, and how we learn those skills are all topics that interest artists dealing with the pedagogical and dialogical issues found within this dissertation. Subsequently, they will increasingly find their way into the larger art world conversation.

Aijaz Ahmad has critiqued a lack of "lived connection" between the cultural radicalism of the American academy and any home-grown labor movement. In other words, the American academic system has not been able to generate lived connections to the very sites where specific mediations are required. How can academia connect, over a period of time, cultural productions with other forms of productive labor and political processes? As this dissertation has argued, recent theoretical movements, including post-colonial literary theory, have often excised themselves from those lived connections dealing with political movements, particularly at the local level where those processes and their effects could be used most immediately – in the pedagogical sense – in order to pose questions on larger issues dealing with colonialism and oppression.³⁰³ If we begin to extend beyond this argument on labor and its conditions we might also begin to question the paradoxes of the theoretical conditions we have mapped out here.

³⁰² Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 35.

³⁰³ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 5.

We have a great deal to benefit, theoretically speaking, from the researcher whom draws closer to the communities that these practices address and with whom they form collaborations. The risk is in challenging the critical distance we are asked to maintain with the hopes that we learn something otherwise unlearnable in the interim.

Educational spaces, both permanent and provisional, are sites for artistic labor and inquiry for a variety of reasons. The neo-liberal policies of the past few decades have been an all-out assault on all manner of public and civic institutions. This erosion has hit systems of education particularly hard, at the same time that information technologies have made information and data so accessible. The massive divestment from educational systems is global. From Santiago de Chile to the University of California system, the increased pressure universities are facing to both privatize their infrastructure and lower operational costs by raising tuition – in most cases doing away with free or affordable education altogether – is one important backdrop to the "pedagogical" turn within contemporary art. Artists have seized the dereliction of this public landscape and the rise of enterprise culture as an opportunity to mimic, mock, create, and re-create bureaus, schools, corporations, associations, laboratories and many other

projects that take on the branding of official spaces of labor and learning.³⁰⁴ In efforts to make sense of this new failure in civic space artists around the globe have taken to investigating, not only the "institutional logic" of labor – a preoccupation found with art periods as disparate as Surrealism and Institutional Critique – but also are attempting to go beyond the purely representational and enter the realm of the real. Although the way artists examine these issues is quite varied, quite often this move is shaped by the kinds of dialogical methodologies that have occupied our attention in this text.

Case study: Tijuaneados Anónimos

The 2008 crime wave in Tijuana, Mexico, that saw 843 people murdered could in great part be attributed to the breaking up of the Arellano-Felix drug cartel, an effort put forth by both its rivals as well as by the Mexican federal government's war on drugs. Baja California state attorney general Daniel de la Rosa claimed that 90 percent of those deaths were related to drug trafficking in the border city of 1.5 million.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 153.

³⁰⁵ Statistics drawn from NBC news: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/28443507/ns/world_news-americas/t/winds-down-killings-tijuana.

Having lived in Tijuana just prior to this period, I witnessed the intensely baroque nature of the killings, which included victims stuffed into acid baths and placed on public streets or bodies hanging from bridges. Most of these macabre scenes included notes from one drug gang to its rivals and were placed for news crews to film and distribute over the air and in the press. This task of diffusion was done with great enthusiasm and efficiency. The grisly scenes were devoured by the public, echoing a kind of media blood bath seen in other parts of Mexico going through similar violent episodes. In these contexts, the victim's bloody and massacred body seemed always to lead the front-page news. According to many media critics, the journalistic endeavor here was clear: dead bodies on the street were only good for selling newspapers and airtime, nothing more. But this was not only a media crisis driven by the press. Both the drug gangs and the government had their roles to play in promoting media coverage of the violence. On the one hand, the military was actively pursuing the cartel leaders through both public displays of power, using military infrastructure as well as the well-known televised displays of confiscated contraband and apprehended criminals.³⁰⁶ On the other were the drug cartels orchestrating acts of violence for media coverage, promoting the creation of musical narco-corridos, videos and

³⁰⁶ Laurie Freeman, "State of Siege: Drug-Related Violence and Corruption in Mexico Unintended Consequences of the War on Drugs," *Washington Office on Latin America*, June 2006, http://www.wola.org/publications/state_of_siege_drug_related_violence_and_corruption_in_mexico.

blogs and what can be termed narco-propaganda.³⁰⁷ Though not fully examined, the surging popularity of this kind of narco-culture, where popular bands are writing corridos, a popular form of musical genre, testifying to the exploits of local drug cartels in a way that romanticizes the criminal act, cannot be underestimated in a media-saturated city like Tijuana. The city has been the home of countless musical and video art pioneers over the years, including the numerous offshoots of the Nortec Collective and many others.³⁰⁸ Film and music, in this capital of illicit entertainment, have been a staple of Tijuana production and consumption for decades. The popularity of the narco-corrido in the city, despite the federal government banning them on public airwaves, can be attested to by the huge fan base that supports groups like the Tucanes de Tijuana, a band that has, on more than one occasion, penned narco-corridos celebrating the violent exploits of drug cartels and even threatening local government officials.³⁰⁹

The Tijuana-based bulbo collective, made up of artists who also simultaneously ran a media company called Galatea Audio/Visual, decided to take action after two members lost loved ones to the violence. They felt like the city was dealing with issues of isolation and a growing feeling of inevitability

³⁰⁷ Howard Campbell, "Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican 'Drug War' An Anthropological Perspective," *Latin American Perspectives* 41, no. 2 (March 1, 2014): 60–77.

³⁰⁸ Josh Kun and Fiamma Montezemolo, *Tijuana Dreaming: Life and Art at the Global Border* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 336.

³⁰⁹ Richard Marosi, "Narco Ballads Without a Home," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/aug/12/local/la-me-narco-band-20100807>.

around the violence. Violence was being treated and discussed only in the ways that the media (and its private interests) were allowing. bulbo, like many others, also sensed that the framing of the violence was being reported, to a great degree, for the commercial advantage of sensational news stories. The media was framing the violence, and subsequently, the public discourse around violence. They sensed that few in the art and cultural realm in Tijuana were investigating the effects of violence on the larger community or offering alternatives.³¹⁰ A subjectivity of violence³¹¹ was being constructed, much as it had in Medellín in the 90s, and bulbo decided, in the midst of the carnage, to open a space in their city to address it.

In February of 2008 they opened a space to the public in downtown Tijuana called *Tijuaneados Anónimos*, based on Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and their twelve-step program (Figure 7). The term *tijuaneado* is local slang used to describe something that has been poorly treated and of suspicious origin. A common example would be advertising a car for sale and highlighting the fact that the car has not been *tijuaneado* to reinforce the assertion that it has been

³¹⁰ This is an assertion made by bulbo on a few occasions, and it is a difficult claim to substantiate. Nevertheless, I can personally attest to this assertion as I was living part-time in Tijuana just before the violence broke and followed the art scene there closely. This observation is not meant to be a critique of other artist's production or careers, rather a contextual filter for how to understand the position of the *Tijuaneados Anónimos* space as an art project that did not position itself within an art discourse during its one-year life span. One notable exception would be the exhibition curated by Lucia Sanroman and Ruth Estevez called *Proyecto Civico* for Centro Cultural Tijuana (2008).

³¹¹ Jimeno, *Violencia cotidiana en la sociedad rural*. n.p.

well maintained. To be tijuaneado is to live in a state of precarity, within a system with no laws governing or regulating that existence. A form of “bare life” where “third world ingenuity” is required to survive. That ingenuity is a result of having to substitute and reuse materials in ways not originally intended: old tires used for hillside foundations or discarded garage doors from the U.S. that become walls of a makeshift dwelling. It is a term invented in and circulated within the city of Tijuana by its inhabitants. The naming of this condition, and its common usage and circulation reveals something about the city’s livability, from the perspective of its citizens.

Tijuaneados Anónimos’ connection with AA immediately frames the conditions of violence in Tijuana as an illness felt through the body. That illness must be dealt within the community as a therapeutic process of memory building and reconciliation. In this space, participants would take the podium and, much like in an AA meeting, they would state their name, followed by “and I’ve been tijuaneado” as an act of communal solidarity. The acts of witnessing and recognition were carried out over several sessions (Figure 8). The twelve steps of the program, with very little alteration from the original, were hung prominently. A logo that closely resembled that of AA was placed on the front window. They had a dozen or so chairs and a podium where speakers would address the room. They opened their space quietly, with little fanfare, relying on word of mouth.

They were open most days, and as a group they participated often in daily conversations that included members of the public. Participants were kept anonymous, and an effort was made to have the community sustain the space, just as in AA, through donations of money and volunteering of food and labor.

Despite the effort to replicate certain procedures of AA, it was not meant to be a parody in any way. It operated on the assumption that the city needed to work through its illness with community building. In a city entirely made of the immigrants who arrive in Tijuana daily with the sole intention of crossing the border, the prospects of long-term community organizing seem almost impossible. Bulbo understood that the mutilated bodies on the streets and on the television sets were not the only bodies that were suffering from the violence. The subjectivity of violence that was being constructed was a body that, much like a car that had been tijuaneado, carried the history of neglect in the way it moved through the city. More importantly, the subjectivity of violence shows itself, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the way violence becomes banal and normalized through daily interactions of impunity and indifference.³¹² That fragmentation of the social fabric leads to a passivity that further changes the subjectivity and responses of its survivors in the face of continued violence. Facing these obstacles, one is tempted to try and identify the root causes of this violence while forgetting that violence often begets more violence regardless of

³¹² Pécaut, "Guerra contra la Sociedad," 187.

the initial causes.³¹³ The government and the media's attempt to frame the violence exclusively in terms of an armed drug trafficker and criminal versus an equally armed federal soldier loses sight of the affective and emotional transformations that take place in the face of the violence, as well as the role of terror in the larger socio-cultural context. The dialectic of good vs. evil takes over the larger civic problem of the effects of violence on everyone's life. As discussed in the previous chapter, the "friend or enemy" binary logic that looks to exclusively study the agents in a conflict often loses sight of the experience of the violence for the vast majority of the populace.³¹⁴

Tijuaneados Anónimos intended to direct itself to the consequences of violence in an attempt to elude the construction of the subjectivity of violence that was assuredly being constructed in the city. The disarming stories that were shared during any particular session within the intimacy constructed within the room of fellow tijuaneados were spaces of memory recuperation and reconciliation that are essential to healing. Gutierrez Castaneda puts it this way:

Inhabiting violent areas refers not only to living with war or political conflict in the household; it also means accounting for the various emotional frames of aggression, fear and terror, that permeate bodies either by being involved in violent acts, witnessing them or accounting for them in the media, as the experience of these

³¹³ Peter Waldmann, "Is There a Culture of Violence in Colombia?," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 1 (2007): 61–75.

³¹⁴ Pécaut, "Guerra contra la Sociedad," 23.

affective acts shape social relations. The question of the subjectivity of violence involves a micropolitics before a macropolitics.³¹⁵

And yet, *Tijuaneados Anónimos* was not limited to the TA space in downtown Tijuana. The project was a multivalent effort that found avenues in film, music, therapy, activism and art. A second collaboration that emerged from the project involved bulbo being invited into a larger research project I organized in collaboration with the Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT) called *Proyecto Cívico: Diálogos e Interrogantes* (2008-2009) to organize a set of conversations that investigated the cultural center as a civic space in the city. Bulbo, along with Daniel Salinas, a newspaper journalist, and Omar Martinez, a local photojournalist, did in-depth reporting on the violence in the city, along with members of Asociación Esperanza Contra las Desapariciones Forzadas y la Impunidad (Hope Against Forced Disappearances and Impunity), a local NGO developed through a series of public convenings on the issue of violence in the city.

Bulbo had collaborators across the city working and investigating on various fronts collectively. *Tijuaneados Anonymous: A teardrop, a smile* (2010) was a feature length documentary done in collaboration with Daniel Salinas and Omar Martinez, other journalists covering the violence in the city, teachers,

³¹⁵ Gutierrez Castaneda, *Some Frame-working Concepts*. forthcoming.

entertainers, and members of Asociación Esperanza. It contained carefully edited footage of the TA meeting participants (they needed to remain anonymous) discussing the state of Tijuana. The film trailer carries the following narrative:

The border city of Tijuana, México is experiencing a crisis of unprecedented violence and ungovernability, this situation affects the daily lives of its inhabitants. Every week, a group of people get together in Tijuaneados Anonymous to share experiences and discuss solutions to the erosive phenomenon that affects: the tijuaneado. With painful or playful stories, absurd human tragedies, and heroic deeds, the characters reflect on the city, imagining how they want Tijuana to be and how they want to be as individuals.³¹⁶

The film gave rise to musical collaborations with three local bands in Tijuana. Observations made within the film stitched together to make the lyrics of the song *El Corrido del Ciudadano* (The Citizen's Corrido). Three different local bands representing popular music genres within the border region were asked to interpret the song accordingly and the three versions were released as singles along with accompanying music videos. The most popular version was performed by Herencia Norteña, a local band playing *corrido* music popular in the north of Mexico. This version had the performers singing and performing the lyrics along various sites in Tijuana and thus became the film's soundtrack (Figure 9). The other bands included the Hell Dandys playing a rockabilly version and the band Koñorteño playing a *cumbia*-style interpretation.

³¹⁶ "Tijuaneados Anónimos Trailer," Tijuaneados Anónimos, accessed October 17, 2015, www.tijuaneadosanonimos.org/index.php?/trailer.

Composing and publicly releasing a *corrido* that was questioning the violence was strategic. The song asks the listener if they could imagine being a better citizen by coming together and leaning on each other as tijuaneados. It was a direct response to the popular narco-corrido phenomenon of *corrido* bands being commissioned by drug cartels to romanticize the image of the drug trade as Robin-Hood-style outlaws. It was also a direct response to the aforementioned subjectivity of violence, in which violence and its culture become normalized and narco-corridos and narco-propaganda become appropriated by the general public.³¹⁷ If narco-propaganda is, as Howard Campbell argues, a form of political discourse directed at rival cartels, the general public and government, *El Corrido del Ciudadano* was bulbo's counter-narrative.

El Corrido del Ciudadano intersperses images of Tijuana, the media's coverage of the violence and community organizations fighting impunity while the band sings the following lyrics:

*I'm an ordinary citizen, I don't know about government strategies, but...
 from what I read in the newspapers I think the city is in bad shape.
 I have to break down the barriers that...
 are linked with the barriers of others that cause all this we live together.
 The city is the sum of everyone. (repeat)
 If we each do our bit, the city the city will be different
 To achieve what I'm talking about
 We have to start with ourselves.*

³¹⁷ Campbell, "Narco-Propoganda," 65.

*This reality is very harsh
 People suffer all the time
 They don't believe in the government anymore
 David Harvey put it well:
 It's not what kind of city we want...
 but what kinds of citizens we want to be.³¹⁸*

El Corrido del Ciudadano begins to ask larger questions about the role of citizenship in a city that offers few public services for its citizens. What is citizenship in a post-NAFTA border city? It was also an inquiry into the media and what their civic duties within this paradigm of violence. The film, the musical collaborations, their radio releases, and the TA space deliberately chose to have a conversation with social actors whom had little to do with the field of mainstream art in the city. Tijuana was emerging from a moment when the city and many of its artists, bulbo included, were being invited to art events around the globe. The city was having its “art star” moment. But the fact that nearly the entire TA project was fostered by an art group that made little attempt to frame their civic project as “art” was equally important.³¹⁹ The *Tijuaneados Anónimos* space, the conceptual and investigative anchor for the entire project, operated on a 1:1 scale that defies the traditional place of spectatorship in art, or the cultural practice as an art “event” and thus seeks to elude a form of ontological capture

³¹⁸ “El Corrido del Ciudadano,” *Tijuaneados Anónimos*, YouTube video, 3:11, February 7, 2010. www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2_yAcTULvk. Translation by the author.

³¹⁹ There was an exhibition entitled *Inside the Wave* (2008) at San Diego Museum of Art where their installation of the TA spaces was featured, but this was an initiative generated by the museum’s then curator Bettie-Sue Hertz.

as “art.” This concept, articulated by Stephen Wright, states the following about practices that operate on a 1:1 scale:

They are not scaled-down models – or artworld-assisted prototypes – of potentially useful things or services (the kinds of tasks and devices that might well be useful if ever they were wrested from the neutering frames of artistic autonomy and allowed traction in the real). Though 1:1 scale initiatives make use of representation in any number of ways, they are not themselves representations of anything. 1:1 practices are both what they are, and propositions of what they are.³²⁰

The bulbo collective was not performing art with *Tijuaneados Anónimos*, and yet what they were making involves a very high degree of artistic competency and rigorous methodologies. They sought a different relationship between the community and the realm of culture making by eluding the spectatorship of art. This highlights the focus of the project to operate in other adjacent realms of cultural work and activism. Projects like these reintroduce a “use-value” back into the conversation – not by the more traditional avenue of qualifying art’s effectiveness, but by foregrounding the various ways competency in artistic practices get executed and circulated– whether the cultural actors are defined as artists or not, thus democratizing the playing field of art.

³²⁰ Wright, *Toward a Lexicon*, 3.

* * *

Tijuaneados Anónimos' dialogical method, can easily be said to be mimicking AA. It might be coincidental that AA was co-founded by Father Edward Dowling, a Catholic priest who based the twelve-step program on Ignatius de Loyola's Spiritual Exercises. It might also be coincidental that the personal narratives of AA in this case become far more contextual and structural in TA by discussing the city and its systemic problems. What is clear is that the dialogical/emancipatory traditions we have been framing here must be on the theoretical landscape of those researchers studying these kinds of practices. Up until this point, they have not been.

The mimicking of local organizations that assist the oppressed, in neo-liberal economic contexts that desperately lack these services should be noted as a central condition of all three case studies. It is under these conditions, witnessing the erosion of the progressive social contract – education, health care, union labor, welfare, and others – that contemporary artists are working. These scenarios must be kept in mind. But as I have argued, there are deeper histories in the Americas that have not yet been fully recognized nor researched. The methodological legacy of Liberation Theology and the experimental pedagogical models left to us, particularly by Freire, but by others as well, are in need of

further study if researchers are to fully understand these practices and how they operate. The legacy of those emancipatory methodologies might not be overtly scripted into the ecology of resources artists have in mind when creating a speech situation, but they are there nevertheless. They are there because those earlier practices created reverberations that exist today in Social Science centers and pedagogical models that continue to be hugely influential.

This challenge to correctly frame and understand this form of cultural work is not restricted to researchers and academics. Curatorial workers have, up to this point, been mostly occupied with exhibition production. But there is an important opening here for considering what larger community-based curatorial work would look like and what kinds of important research could be garnered from such an experimental project of balancing resources of cultural institutions and community interests.

Many projects have taken up the physical space of a community center in order to create safe spaces of learning through collective reconciliation work (Tijuaneados Anónimos) or have taken on teaching methodologies of working with historically oppressed native communities (Los Hieleros de Chimborazo) while others create community-specific memory recuperation projects to deal with historic violence amongst neighbors (La Piel de la Memoria). These various operations carry the premise of pedagogical labor at their core, but more

importantly, they attempt to seek knowledge and share it with communities beyond those officially legislated or sanctioned. There are no studies to date that situate or trace the history of these various artistic and pedagogical methodologies directly to Liberation Theology. Neither is there a study that attempts to trace the history of the various liberatory models using pedagogy directly to recent dialogically-driven art practices today. This dissertation attempts to draw information together to make the argument that liberation pedagogy and the activity that it fostered, both within the social sciences as well as within modern critical pedagogy, should be more closely studied as a source foundation for contemporary community-driven art practices. The artists and cultural actors working these practices today in Latin America understand the art world, including the role its theoretical structures have played – or not played – in their development. The present-day conditions find that same art system, including curatorial work, taking an interest in these practices. At the same time, a theoretical opening has appeared as thinkers begin to study models beyond the paradigms of aesthetic theory. These are important conditions that will need to be addressed if community-based practices in Latin America are to be understood on their own terms and through the lens of their own unique historical legacies.

* * *



Figure 1:

Pablo Sanaguano

Yo soy del cielo, tu de la tierra (I am from the sky, you are from the earth)

Ink on paper cartoon, 2007



Figure 2:

Pablo Sanaguano

Los Hieleros del Chimborazo

Photographic documentation by the artist, 2011

(Re-enacting the path taken by the ice-miners of Chimborazo)



Figure 3:

Pablo Sanaguano

Los Hieleros del Chimborazo

Photographic documentation by the artist, 2011

(Ritual where participants from La Moya ask permission to the Pachamama to extract ice)



Figure 4:

Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá

La Piel de la Memoria (The Skin of Memory)

Photographic documentation by the artists, 1999

(View from inside the bus/museum of memory)



Figure 5:

Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá

La Piel de la Memoria Revisitada (The Skin of Memory Revisited)

Photographic documentation by the author, 2011

(Installation view at the Museo de Antioquia during the Encuentro Internacional de Medellín)



Figure 6:

Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá

La Piel de la Memoria Revisitada (The Skin of Memory Revisited)

Photographic documentation by the artists, 2011

(Project participant conversation/performance at the Museo de Antioquia during the Encuentro Internacional de Medellín)



Figure 7:

bulbo

Tijuaneados Anónimos (Tijuaneados Anonymous)

Photographic documentation by the artists, 2008



Figure 8:

bulbo

Tijuaneados Anónimos (Tijuaneados Anonymous)

Photographic documentation by the artists, 2008



Figure 9:

bulbo

Tijuaneados Anónimos (Tijuaneados Anonymous)

Video Still, 2008

(Video still from the music video *El Corrido del Ciudadano* by Herencia Norteña)

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